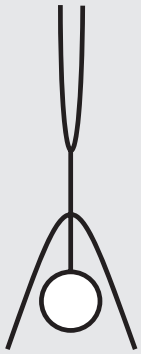


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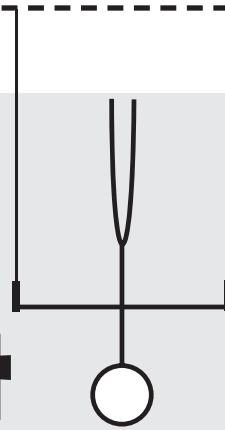


Handstand

is the

Most Important

Skill



By Karen M. Goeller
GymnasticsDrills.com

The Handstand is the most important skill in our sport and remaining tight is essential!

Gymnasts of all levels perform the handstand several times throughout their workout. While performing many skills in gymnastics, the gymnast must actually pass through the handstand or vertical phase safely and efficiently. Without a good handstand a gymnast may have trouble building skills and therefore progressing through the sports many levels safely and efficiently.

The handstand involves so many muscle groups working simultaneously and it is often difficult for the new gymnast to fully master the handstand prior to being expected to perform even more difficult skills.

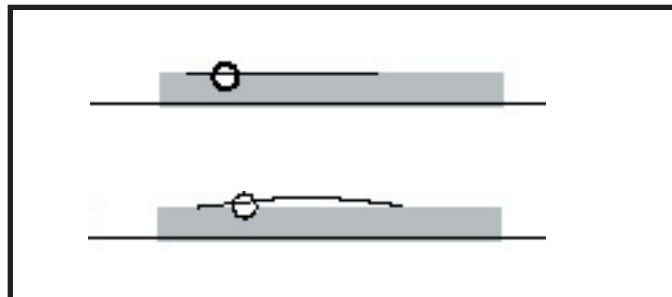
Often times, the enthusiasm level in many gymnastics clubs drives the coaches and athletes to move on to more difficult skills prior to the mastery of those already introduced, such as the handstand. And all too often, the new gymnast has trouble keeping their abdominal section tight or their lower back in the correct position because the focus has changed away from the handstand and onto different skills.

Here are some drills that should help your gymnast learn to pull in their lower abdominal section while elongating their lower back for a more straight and tight handstand position.

Belly Button Lift: Have your gymnast lie on their stomach, face down. Have them place their arms up by their ears, keeping their arms straight and hands (palms) on the floor. Instruct your gymnast to keep everything on the floor, including their hands (palms), arms, chin, armpits, chest, hips, thighs, and (pointed) feet. Once your gymnast is completely flat, instruct them to lift their belly button off the floor, leaving everything else on the floor. Remind your gymnast again to keep their hands (palms), armpits, chest, hips, thighs, and feet down while they lift their belly button up. Once your gymnast lifts their belly button you should see their lower back elongate into the correct position for a handstand. Their buttocks should be under once their belly button is lifted off the floor. Your gymnast has just begun to learn the "pelvic tilt!" Have your gymnast relax and then repeat this drill with enough frequency so that they completely understand how to pull in their belly button and elongate their lower back. Make sure your gymnast keeps everything on the floor with the exception of the belly button area once lifted.



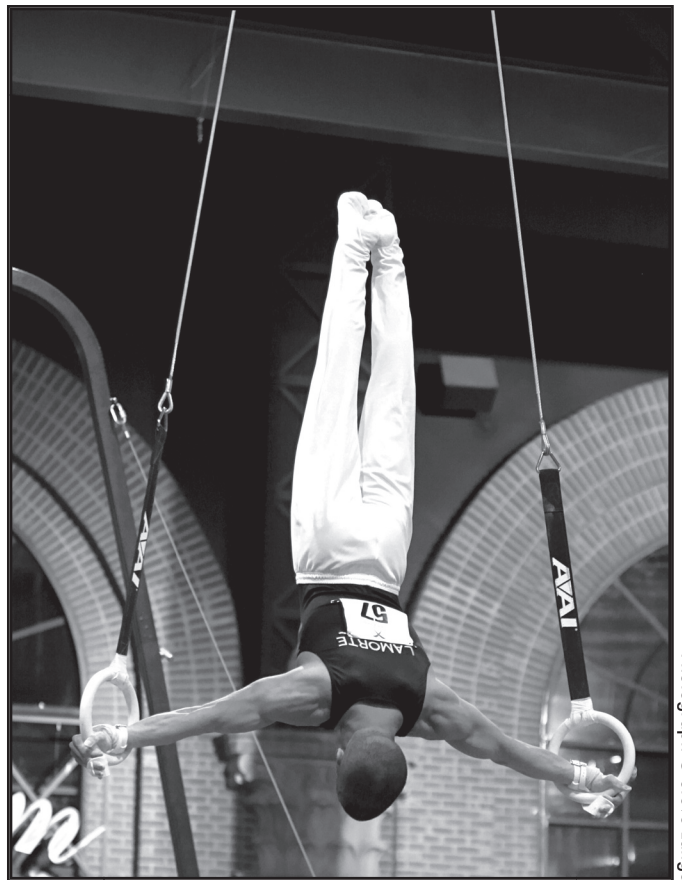
Photograph © Steve Lange



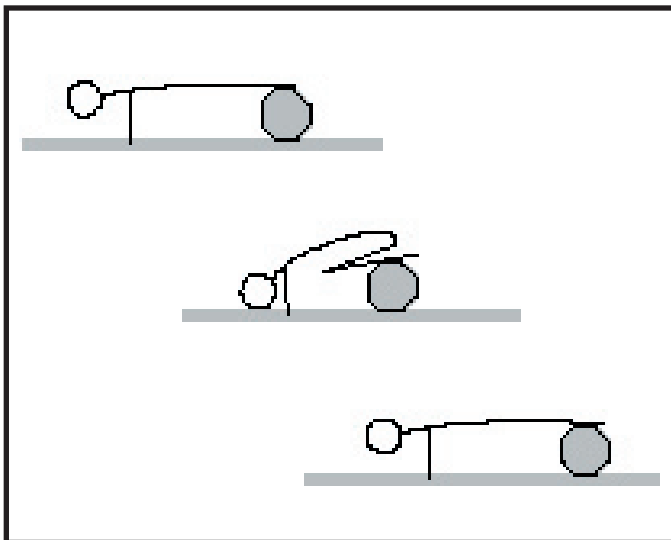
Another drill to help your gymnast understand handstand shape is the Octagon Tuck. Have your gymnast stand in front of an octagon or barrel type mat. Instruct them to stand with their back to the octagon and then one shin at a time on the octagon. Your gymnast should now be in a hand support with their shins on the octagon. Your gymnast's legs, hips, and chest should be off the floor. Next, instruct your gymnast to start with their body, legs, and arms straight. Once your gymnast is completely straight with their shins on the octagon, instruct them to squeeze their buttocks and to pull their belly button in, just as if they were performing the Belly Button Lift. You should see their lower back elongate into the correct position for a handstand. Next, instruct your gymnast to push down on the floor so that the portion of their back between their shoulder blades rises towards the ceiling. Your gymnast will need to learn the shoulder shrug for the handstand as well as for many other skills in the future. Your gymnast has just performed the "pelvic tilt" and will now be expected to hold the pelvic tilt shape while in motion. Once in the correct shape, instruct your gymnast to slowly tuck their knees in toward their chest, keeping that rounded shape, their hands in one place, their arms straight, and their upper body stationary. Next, instruct your gymnast to keep the rounded shape and to open their hips and knees again. Your gymnast must keep the elongated lower back pelvic (tilt) as they are opening their hips and after they have completely opened their hips.

Have your gymnast repeat this drill frequently enough so they completely understand how to keep the elongated lower back while tucking and then opening their hips again.

You can have your gymnast perform this drill on octagons of different heights and then in the handstand for a more complete understanding on how to elongate their lower back and keep that shape.



Photograph © Steve Lange



Remember, the gymnast should first learn how to get tight, form the correct shape, and hold the tight shape lying down or stand up before we can expect them to do so safely upside down or while in motion.

Take it slow and be sure to pay attention to detail; the handstand is the most important skill in the sport of gymnastics!