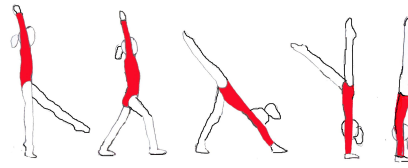


THE HANDSTAND



You are looking for:

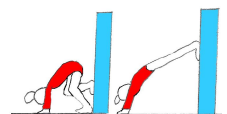
- ✓ Tall, straight starting position, up on tiptoe, arms touching ears.
- ✓ Long lunge step, keeping body straight and open.
- ✓ Wide split of the legs, ideally to keep the straight line from hand to toe.
- ✓ Rear leg is elevated and placed, not driven up.
- ✓ Straight tight body in handstand, head tucked in, arms shoulder width.
- ✓ Hands with fingers spread and slightly bent in to provide maximum leverage.
- ✓ Exit in the same way, coming down in a straight line back into lunge.

Developing on from the Bunny Hop, the next stage would be to explore taking the weight on the hands in an increasingly inverted shape. There are lots of ways to do this, providing variety and challenges, while enforcing the main points and building up strength and confidence, ready for the full Handstand.

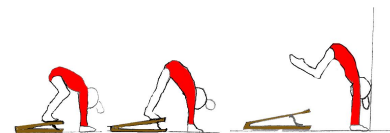
If you only remember one thing.. The learning gymnast should look at their fingers when attempting Handstand. Tucking the head under at the entry stage will result in a rolling forward. However, once vertical, the head can be tucked in to create a straighter line.

Set-ups & Progressions:

- Bunny hops, keeping shoulders strong, and trying to get the hips high.
- Supported Bunny Hops with Coach holding at the hips. Maintain the bent knee balance for a few seconds, or get the child to straighten the legs to the ceiling.
- Facing away from a padded wall (use a crash mat or similar), get the child to bend over in a pike and place hands on the floor. The child then takes the weight on the hands, and walks the feet up the wall to ideally a straight held position.



- Standing on a springboard, the child places the hands on the floor. First attempts should simply be moving from a bent knee to a straight without toppling forward. Then the child can try a Bunny Hop. This can be done close to a matted wall, so that the child does not tip forward. Ask them to try and touch the wall their back.



- Lying stomach down on a platform set at hip height (perhaps created with stacked mats or using a Box), the child slides over and places hands on the floor close to the platform bottom. The knees are drawn into a kneeling position. The child may then extend one leg up vertical, keeping the other knee still. Holding this position gives the child a good idea of the feeling of being totally upside down and taking their body weight.

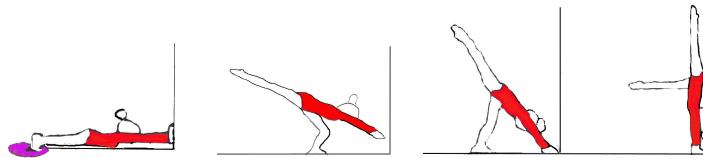


It's a good idea to introduce the lunge step early on, even if the handstand is not yet achieved. The easiest way is to work against a padded wall.

1. Get the child to lie on their tummies with their arms straight out and flat against the wall. Use mats against the wall secured in place. Place a marker under their toes and get them to stand up on the marker. From stretch up on tiptoe, get the child to take a big step forward and place their hands with fingertips touching the wall, while simultaneously lifting the leg.

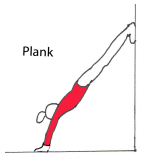
Note: You must try to get the children into to habit of lifting the driving leg as the hands go down. Allowing the gymnast to place the hands before kicking the leg creates an incorrect disconnected sequence, and makes reaching Handstand impossible.

2. Repeat several times then introduce a hop through the standing leg.
3. Ask them if they can try and tap the wall with their lifted leg. Continue by trying to get legs together at the top, and on to holding the Handstand for a few seconds.

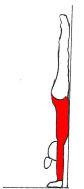


NB Often the child will 'fall' out, come down with legs together, or swap legs in mid air to come out of the handstand. Get the child used to coming down out of the handstand on one leg, the same leg that kicked up. The exit should be as important as the entry into Handstand.

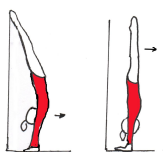
- It is always useful to revisit an earlier progression at this more advanced stage to remind them how straight and tight they need to be in handstand by performing it, or something very close to it, with their whole body facing the wall. They may only reach part of the way up, but it is still a good practice for Handstands, and a challenge in itself. This inverted shape is called a 'Plank'.



- More experienced gymnasts should be able to get almost completely flat against the wall, before tucking the head in and rolling out. This is a very challenging activity, but the easiest way of demonstrating just how straight and tight the Handstand needs to be.

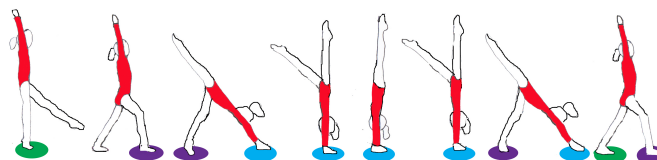


- Another more advanced drill to challenge how tight and straight the gymnast can be, is to kick to Handstand against a wall, but place the hands a little way from the base of the wall so they end in an arched shape. From there, the aim is to do little taps away from the wall with their feet to a completely straight shape for as long as possible, before return the toes to the wall. The Coach may aid body shaping. This is an extremely challenging exercise, but very useful in emphasising what a 'straight' Handstand really is, as it demands the gymnast to pull in and align the core, bottom and shoulders.



If no walls are available, then practise can take place on the floor.

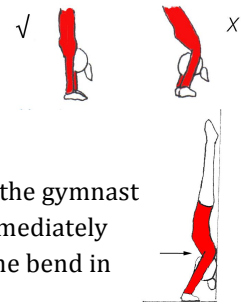
- When taking the Handstand to the floor, the Coach needs to encourage the Gymnast to continue to stretch and reach forward. Often the child will revert to a short step, and a strong kicking action to get up to the Handstand. This is incorrect, and often causes the gymnast to fall out into Bridge, or worse, to land flat on their back.
- Use 3 spots or hoops in a line as markers for their feet and hands as shown here. The gymnast steps from marker 1 (green), places the foot on marker 2 (purple), and hands on marker 3 (turquoise) into Handstand. Then coming down, the gymnast does the reverse, with the hands on 3, first foot comes down on 2, and the next foot on 1 to finish in lunge.



- To reiterate how tight the body needs to be, the Coach can try to pull the legs apart while the gymnast is in Handstand. The gymnast must fight to keep squeezing them together.

Common Faults:

- Not so much a fault, but a hindrance is poor flexibility in the legs. A narrow split of the legs on entry will require a considerable kick to get to vertical, and therefore will be uncontrolled.
- Perhaps the most important aspect in the handstand is the action of the shoulders. Arms must be kept back by the ears throughout for the Handstand to be successful. Watch out for a collapsing, or bringing forward of the shoulders. This is often accompanied by a tucking in of the head, rather than looking at the hands. It looks like this: -
- It is reasonably easy to spot, as the handstand almost immediately falls over into a roll with the gymnast getting nowhere near vertical. Be aware when performed against a wall, as it may not be immediately obvious, but look for the head and shoulders touching the wall first, and you will see the same bend in the shoulder angle if you look at the gymnast from the side.
- The gymnast goes up to Handstand but immediately falls out of into bridge or flat on their back. This can be caused by a short step in and a compensating hard kick to get the legs up and overhead. It can also be due to a particularly flexible, but not particularly strong back. This can be corrected by asking them to take a longer step in, and a wide split of the legs as it takes some of the power out of the kick, and also straightens the upper body before the feet reach vertical.



A Little Tip: Artistic gymnastic Coaches would shudder at this, but you might be surprised at the result. If your gymnasts are trying to hold Handstand and are struggling, instead of having them start with their arms up by their ears, get them to start with their arms by their sides, and simply swing them gently forward to place their hands as they swing the back leg up. Because the shoulder sockets are more relaxed as the bodyweight goes over the top of them, rather than rigidly locked in place by the ears, the gymnast can feel more easily how they need to adjust the tension with little movements to stay inverted.

Supporting Handstand

Depending on the size and ability of the gymnast, the Coach can either hold at the hips or at the ankles.

- For smaller, less able gymnasts, it is preferable to kneel down facing them, and aid the kick to vertical by holding at the hips. For bigger gymnasts, the Coach would still take the hips, but be standing up.
- For more able gymnasts, who need less help, or who are still learning how to keep the core and legs tight, the Coach can stand to one side, slightly in front of the gymnast, and catch the front and back of the calves.



N.B It should be noted that very young children up to approximately 4 years may struggle with a fully inverted Handstand position. This is simply due to physical development. At this stage the head is still relatively large in relation to the limbs, and therefore even with the arms straight, the top of the head may still be touching the floor.