

ASSISTING HANDSTANDS: A YOGA COACH'S PERSPECTIVE

For many athletes, the fear of falling in a handstand requires you to master an unfamiliar relationship with gravity. It requires flexibility in the wrists, openness in the shoulders and strength in the arms and core. You ultimately want to feel comfortable in this position and be able to do a freestanding handstand away from the wall. As coaches, these are the steps we take in helping our athletes get there.

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GETTING THERE



Beginners Should Try: Plank and Downward Facing Dog
These poses help build strength for the handstand. The plank allows students to focus on their abdominal strength against gravity. The shoulders can work to open while finding softness and strength in the wrists and arms.



Intermediate Athletes Should Try: Side Plank and Crow Pose

These positions will continue to bring strength in the shoulders, wrists and increase core strength.



ASSISTING THE HANDSTAND



Athlete: Begin in Downward Facing Dog.



Athlete: Lift your leg into the air for a "split dog".
Coach: Position yourself next to the foot that is on the ground to avoid being kicked. When assisting firmly plant your feet into the ground and place your hands on the shin to support the leg. This creates a stable shelf to allow the athlete to pull down on the left leg and pull up the right leg into a handstand.



Athlete: Maintain a split handstand with one leg vertical while your coach maintains control of the opposite leg.

Coach: Ask the athlete to slowly lift the opposite leg up into full handstand. Repeat on the other leg to build strength equally.



Coach: Spot near the athlete's head. Allow them to kick into handstand and assist by maintaining control of their legs. Place your hand in between the calves to activate the core and move your hand to engage the hips to lift up. This encourages the athlete to maintain a strong core by activating the adductors in the legs to create length. Assisting the athlete helps them maintain control and learn where to engage their muscles to safely come away from the wall.

COMING OUT OF A HANDSTAND



Athlete: Lower one leg then another to the floor coming back to Downward Facing Dog. Finish with countering the spine taking it back to neutral in a Child's Pose.