How to Progress Bodyweight Exercises From Your First Push-U

Sports and Fitness · about 11 minutes · 2026-11-09

Go from wall push-ups to ten strict floor push-ups in six weeks by climbing one tested rung a week with fixed sets, rest targets, and one honest log line.

Things you will need

- Sturdy dining table with no loose centre leaf
- Doorframe pull-up bar rated above your bodyweight
- Pair of gymnastic rings with a door anchor
- Two wooden blocks or parallettes, 3-5 cm high
- Stack of books for squat-box and deficit heights
- Tape measure to mark 30, 45 and 60 cm
- Stable chair or 30-40 cm step platform
- Light loop resistance band for pull-aparts
- Folded towel or knee pad for knee rungs
- Yoga mat for planks and floor work
- Phone on a small tripod for form video
- Interval timer app for holds and rest
- Paper training log or a simple spreadsheet
- Lacrosse ball for chest and lat rubbing

Week 1: Test Your Baseline and Pick Your Rungs

1. **Take Three Baseline Numbers on Day One**
   Rest normally for a day, then test three things in this order with at least 20 minutes between them.
2. **Prepare Your Wrists and Shoulders Before Every Session**
   Give five minutes to the joints that carry bodyweight pressing, because wrists are the most common reason beginners quit push-ups entirely.
3. **Start on the Easiest Rung You Can Repeat**
   The push-up ladder has seven rungs: standing wall push-ups, then hands on a 60-centimetre counter or bench, a 45-centimetre chair seat, a 30-centimetre step, knee push-ups on a folded towel, full floor push-ups, and finally deficit push-ups with the hands raised 3 to 5 centimeters.
4. **Set Reps, Sets and Rest at Effort Eight**
   For each movement do 2 to 4 sets of 6 to 12 repetitions, stopping every set with 1 to 3 clean reps still in reserve, which is what effort 7 to 8 out of 10 means in practice.
5. **Write One Log Line and Learn the Rule**
   One line per session is enough: date, rung used, sets and reps, rest you actually took, effort out of 10, and how wrists, elbows, shoulders, and knees felt the next morning.

Weeks 2-3: Climb the Push and Squat Ladders With Quality

6. **Keep Your Elbows at 45 Degrees Throughout**
   The single most useful cue for every pressing rung is to keep the upper arm about 45 degrees away from the torso rather than flared out to the side, which puts the front of the shoulder and the elbow

capsule in the weak position.

7. **Drop the Incline Height by Fifteen Centimetres**

   Measure your incline surface with a tape measure and write the height in the log, because 60, 45, and 30 centimeters are real steps and guessing them is how people stall for weeks.

8. **Train Full Depth on Every Squat**

   Depth is the quality standard for squats, not a badge: descend until the hip crease passes the top of the kneecap, or as far as you can go with heels flat, a neutral spine, and knees tracking over the second toe.

9. **Build Squat Strength Through an Assisted Step**

   If full depth is not yet available, use an assisted squat-to-step: stand in front of a stable 30 to 40 centimetre seat, sit back and down until your weight barely touches it, then drive up without bouncing, for 3 sets of 8 to 10 with both hands lightly on a doorframe.

10. **Give Each Muscle 48 Hours Between Sessions**

    Schedule three sessions a week on fixed nonconsecutive days, Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday being the shape that survives a busy calendar, and never repeat the same hard rung two days running.

Week 4: Add Pulls, Hinges and Core So Nothing Is Left Out

11. **Hang First, Then Learn the Scapular Pull-Up**

    Pulling is the rung most beginners have to build from nothing, and it starts with the shoulder blades rather than the arms.

12. **Row Under a Sturdy Table or on Rings**

    Bodyweight pulling does not need a bar you can lift your body to.

13. **Pair Every Pull With a Hip Hinge**

    Add the posterior chain with a hip hinge the body can actually load at home: single-leg glute bridges for 2 sets of 8 to 12 each side, or two-leg bridges with shoulder blades squeezed at the top for a 2-second hold, and a 4-second lowering once the reps come easily.

14. **Turn the Plank Into Braced Working Sets**

    Core training is the one place a percentage works well: take your baseline plank hold and do three sets at about 70 percent of that number with 60 seconds between, so a 40-second max becomes three 25 to 30 second sets.

15. **Film One Set and Fix Compensation Faults**

    Set the phone on the floor for one set of push-ups, one set of squats, and one set of rows, and watch for the five faults that quietly move load into joints: hips sagging or piking during presses, elbows flaring wide, knees collapsing inward at the bottom of a squat, the head reaching forward instead of the chest lowering, and the jaw and hands gripping so hard the shoulders hike up.

Weeks 5-6: Add Volume, Deload, and Retest the Baselines

16. **Raise Weekly Volume Before You Raise Rungs**

    When a rung starts to stick, the honest first move is more volume at that level rather than a harder level.

17. **Introduce Deficit Pressing and Slow Negatives**

    Once you can complete 10 strict floor push-ups, two small changes extend the ladder without

demanding pull-up strength you do not have yet.

18. Deload for One Week When Progress Stops

If reps have not moved in three weeks, or joints ache for two days after every session, take a deload week: keep the same three sessions but cut total sets by 30 to 40 percent, drop one rung on the hardest movement of each pattern, and hold effort at 6 out of 10.

19. Retest the Three Numbers in Week Six

Take 48 hours of easy living, then repeat the identical three tests from day one, on the same surfaces, at the same time of day, using the same counting rules.

20. Stop and See a Clinician for These Red Flags

Some signals are not part of progressing.

Sources

1. Physical Activity Guidelines — Trending Topics and Resources
   https://acsm.org/education-resources/trending-topics-resources/physical-activity-guidelines/
2. Hitting the Activity Mark
   https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/hitting-the-activity-mark
3. Exercise and Fitness Resources
   https://www.nasm.org/
4. Health Library — Exercise and Fitness
   https://www.hss.edu/health-library
5. Physical Activity — Fact Sheet
   https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity
6. Progressive Overload
   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_overload
7. Push-up
   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Push-up

Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/Progress-Bodyweight-Exercises. Corrections: https://www.howcompass.com/c