

Pull-up Progression for the Everyday Athlete

By: Charlie Cates, CPT, PES

<http://selfmadefitness.com/>
charlie@selfmadefitness.com

After spending the majority of the past five months working with personal training clients, it has become quite apparent that the masses have incredibly poor relative strength. People are struggling, and I mean struggling, to control their own bodies' movements with exercises such as pushups and front and side bridges. For a lot of people, however, moving large stacks of plates is not appealing to them. Instead, they would much rather be able to move their own bodies. Within the realm of body-weight exercises, I would say that the number one thing I hear from my clients is the goal of being able to accomplish a pull-up.

A lot of people are using an inverted row as a substitute and a precursor for a pull-up. That is all fine and well, but eventually the individual needs to learn how to pull him or herself vertically. With that in mind, here is a progression that I have found to be extremely useful in getting people to conquer the all-mighty pull-up:

1. Straight-arm Hangs
2. Chin-up Holds
3. Negative Chin-ups
4. Pull-up Holds
5. Negative Pull-ups
6. Half-rep Chin-ups
7. Jumping Pull-ups
8. Manually Assisted Pull-ups (use a spotter, not a partner or bands)
9. Chin-ups
10. Pull-ups

Straight-arm Hangs are just hanging from a bar for time. This will build grip strength relative to their body weight. For Chin-up Holds and Pull-up Holds, the individual steps on a box or bench to get their chin above the bar and then holds him or herself there for time. Just to clarify, a chin-up has a supinated (palms facing face) grip while a pull-up has a pronated (palms facing away from face) grip. Pull-ups are more difficult for people to perform because there is a greater focus on the lats and less on the biceps. The negatives are performed by starting in the same position as the holds and then lowering yourself down to fully extended arms as slowly as possible. Half-rep chin-ups are just like they sound—using a bench or box to bring you up to the halfway point of a full chin-up and then pulling yourself the rest of the way. Jumping pull-ups are performed by jumping from the ground and grabbing on to the bar, and then using the momentum from your jump to pull yourself the rest of the way up. Manually assisted pull-ups are almost the real thing, you just have somebody help press you up when you start to get stuck on the way up. I have found that the best way to spot somebody on a pull-up is to put your hands around their rib cage and shoulder press them as they pull. If you have access to an assisted pull-up machine or bands, you can most certainly use those to help make the exercise easier. I prefer the manual spotter because they can decide when during the exercise you need help and when you don't.

So there's a progression for you if you want to start doing pull-ups. If you can already do pull-ups this progression can still be of benefit if you ever want to mix up your pull-up routine.

Get big or die tryin'.

Charlie Cates
Self Made, Owner

Charlie Cates is a human performance specialist and the owner of Self Made (<http://selfmadefitness.com/>). He is a Certified Personal Trainer and Performance Enhancement Specialist through NASM and has worked with competitive and everyday athletes of all ages and ability levels, from 9-year-old kids to NFL MVP's. He can be reached via e-mail at charlie@selfmadefitness.com.

This article may be reproduced with biographical information intact.