

# the **CrossFit**<sup>®</sup>

JOURNAL ARTICLES

## The Forward Roll

Roger Harrell

The forward roll has a tremendous number of applications outside the gym. In a forward fall, most people will sprawl. Practicing and getting completely comfortable with a forward roll will change this reaction. In a forward fall, rolling out will greatly reduce impact and allow for a continuation of movement that gets you to your feet with little or no interruption. Just performing the forward roll improves kinesthetic awareness and engages a large number of muscle groups.

### Initial Drill

Candlestick roll to stand: Start in a stand, squat down, roll into a tucked candlestick (<http://www.drillsandskills.com/images/display?path=candlestick.jpg>) position, and roll back up to standing without using your hands. Repeat this drill with extending to a full candlestick before rolling up to a stand. Do this drill before doing

forward rolls. It will immediately mitigate several very common technique problems.

### Tucked Forward Roll

Start in a squat on the balls of your feet with knees together. Place your hands flat on the floor with spread hands. While maintaining pressure on your hands, tuck your head and place the back of your head between your hands while pushing with your legs to roll over forward. Maintain a rounded back by contracting your abs, and keep looking at your knees. As you roll forward, try to maintain momentum to roll up onto your feet and stand up without pushing off the floor with your hands. Your arms should just reach forward at the end of the roll.

Tucked Forward Roll



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## The Forward Roll (continued...)

### Extended Forward Roll

An extended forward roll is initiated exactly like a tucked forward roll. The difference occurs when your feet leave the ground. The moment your feet leave the ground you should extend your feet toward the ceiling to arrive in an extended hollow position with pressure on your hands. This will allow for a more extended roll that carries more momentum. Finishing will be the same as for the tucked forward roll but with less of a tuck. Maintain the extended body position as long as possible, only tucking your legs just before your feet hit the ground to stand up.

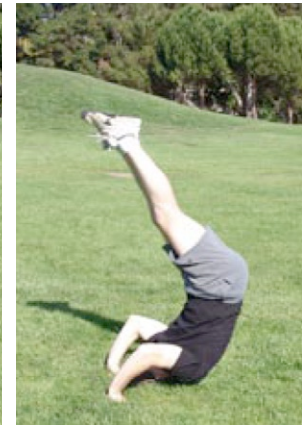
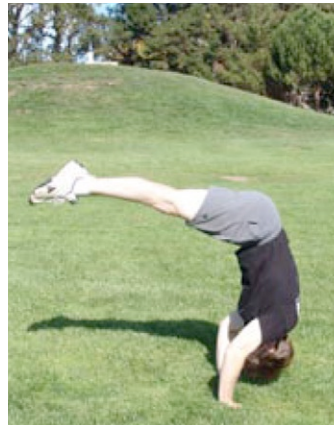
Extended Forward Roll



### Extended Forward Roll with Nominal Hand Support

For this roll you will put even more pressure on your hands as your feet leave the ground. This will result in a bent-arm rounded-body handstand as the roll initiates. This helps to build a bridge between a forward roll and a handstand forward roll. As with the other rolls, extension and maintaining pressure throughout will maintain momentum and keep the roll smooth and controlled.

Extended Forward Roll with Hand Support



### Handstand Bent-Arm Forward Roll

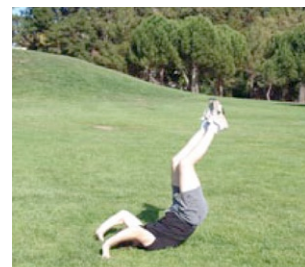
Initiate the move by kicking to a handstand. As the handstand falls forward, bend your arms, round your upper back, and roll out. Maintaining pressure and keeping an extended rounded body will allow for a smooth, controlled roll. A tight tuck is not necessary for the roll; in fact, in a fast or powerful roll a tighter tuck will make the roll less controlled and rougher. Your body should stay extended throughout the roll, rounding just enough to create curvature to allow the

rolling movement. Ensure that your handstand is falling forward a bit before trying to roll. It is very common to try to roll out as your feet come back (toward a stand), which results in landing on your back in a pike with no forward momentum. If the handstand is not falling forward, just come back to a stand and kick up into the handstand again.

Common Error



Good Technique



## The Forward Roll (continued...)



### Handstand Straight-Arm Forward Roll

A straight-arm handstand forward roll is the ultimate demonstration that tucking into a ball is not necessary for a roll. It is quite straightforward to roll out of a handstand without bending your arms at all. All that is required is a tight, hollow body. As the handstand falls forward, tuck your head in, extend through your

shoulders, and hollow your body. This will create a large-radius circle with your body and, as long as proper positions are maintained, will allow for a very smooth powerful roll.

Handstand Straight-Arm  
Forward Roll



### Handstand Forward Roll Pike Up To Handstand

Once you've got down the handstand straight-arm forward roll, you can practice sequences of rolls and add new approaches. One example is a handstand forward roll pike up to handstand. As you complete the forward roll, continue the motion and place your hands on the floor about one foot in front of your feet, pushing off your feet while lifting your hips to pike up to the next handstand. This will lead directly into the next roll so this sequence can be repeated until you run out of floor space. The main keys are to maintain momentum by using the roll to get into the next handstand, and to lift your hips first as you jump off your feet. Straight arms should be maintained throughout this exercise.

### Variants

#### Forward Straddle Roll

Start in a straddle stand. Perform a forward roll while maintaining the straddle. Reach forward to place your hands on the ground between your legs and push up to a straddle stand. Strive to place your hands on the floor and begin pushing before your feet hit the ground. Your goal should be to lift off of the ground and begin the pressing motion up to a stand. This is done by actively lifting your toes as soon as your hands contact the floor to roll through a straddle L. The ultimate goal is to press through the straddle L to a handstand without your feet contacting the floor.

Forward Straddle  
Roll



#### Forward Pike Roll

In a forward pike roll your legs will not bend. An extended forward roll is essential for a forward pike roll. You

## The Forward Roll (continued...)

must maintain as much momentum as possible. Keep an extended hollow position until just before your feet hit the ground. At this point, pike forward aggressively and place your hands on the ground next to your knees. Push aggressively into the pike and keep pushing through as long as possible. Resist all temptation to bend your knees. It is better to keep your legs straight and not make the stand than to bend your knees to stand up.

### Forward Pike Roll



### Possible assists

- Use gravity for assistance by performing forward rolls down an incline mat or grassy hill.
- A partner can help spot the skill by placing one hand on either hip of the student and lifting while pushing forward. Be sure to lift sufficiently so there is little load on the head or neck.

### Roll Assists



### Dive Roll

A dive roll is a roll from a jump. Start small, imagining a bar in front of your hips that you must jump over headfirst and then roll out. Remember to maintain pressure on your hands as soon as they contact the floor. As you get more comfortable with the dive roll, make it bigger. Eventually you will be able to do a dive roll over objects at shoulder height or higher and roll out safely.

### Forward Roll Jump Sequence

Perform any of the primary forward rolls and jump aggressively as you stand up. This jump can be done with or without swinging your arms. Allowing for arm swing will result in a higher jump. Requiring arms to be kept up during the jump will require and develop more leg strength. Each roll can end with a different jump—straight, tuck, straddle, pike, or full turn. Play with different combinations.

### Common mistakes

- Not enough pressure on the hands. Good hand pressure is essential for a controlled smooth forward roll.
- Allowing body to be loose and flopping onto the floor. Ropes and deflated balls do not roll well. Round rigid objects do. Keeping your body in a tight hollow will allow for the best roll.
- Arched lower back in the roll. Be sure to turn your pelvis under as you roll to create a rounded lower back. A flat lower back will result in your pelvis hitting the floor abruptly. If you have trouble maintaining the forward pelvic tilt, practice hollow rocks and V-ups to develop the required abdominal strength.

