

the
CrossFit
JOURNAL ARTICLES

Applications of the Support on Rings

Tyler Hass



Last month I covered the support position on rings in significant detail. This month, we're going to build on that foundation and look at applications of the support position and variations on it that can add challenge to your training. We will also go into detail on an exercise that regularly appears in CrossFit workouts, the ring dip.

First though, let's talk about setting up your rings. I recommend spacing them 50 centimeters apart, which is the official distance. Personally, I don't measure out 50 centimeters every time I hook up my rings. Gymnasts have a clever tool for measuring out the right distance. They call it "your arm"—specifically the length of your forearm from the back of the elbow to the tips of your

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Application of the Support on Rings (continued...)

fingers. This distance tends to work well for most people. I usually add another inch or two, but you will figure out on your own what you like best. In any case, it's likely to be a width that puts the rings just outside your shoulders.



Measuring for ring width

Weighted support

Holding a perfect support (see last month's article for the standards) for a full minute is a great goal for everyone to have. In fact, I think it should be attained before you start training ring dips. Another worthy goal is to hold a support, plus additional load totaling half your body weight for a minute.

There are two main approaches to adding weight. The first is to wear the extra weight on a hip belt or a vest. The second is to hold a dumbbell, kettlebell, or weight plate with your feet. I like this option because it allows you to dump the weight at any time and continue on with what you're doing, unweighted, or to simply and safely abort the movement. (The video, linked below, shows various ways to add weight to pull-ups; these work just as well for dips.)



Support

Weighted pullups



Leaning support

When you change your body alignment while in a support, you also change the muscular recruitment and difficulty of holding the position. Leaning forward from a mature support position shifts the emphasis to your pecs, front delts, and biceps. It is a great exercise toward developing a maltese (an advanced strength hold on rings). Leaning back in a support shifts the load to your back, lats, and triceps. It is an early step toward developing a Victorian, which is the hardest strength move on rings (and which no one in the world has yet performed perfectly). It is basically an upside-down maltese—essentially a front lever in which the body is level with the arms.



No lean



Leaning back



Leaning forward



Maltese

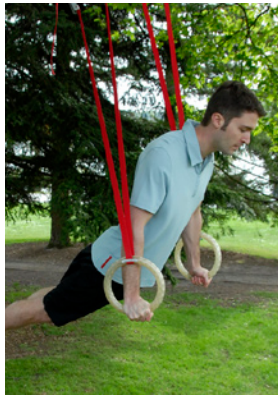
Swing in support

Swinging on parallel bars is not easy, but at least they don't move. Swinging on rings is harder than finding an Olympic lifting platform at a commercial gym. It's so cracked out and weird that it would be madness to even try it. Madness? This is CrossFit! So, of course, we'll give it a shot.

Start in a support, and then bring your legs forward a bit and swing them back to generate some momentum. From here on, you will keep your body relatively straight. You will gain additional amplitude from leaning into the swing and pushing down on the rings.



Initiating the swing



Back of swing



Front of swing

It's important to start out very slowly, as these can quickly get out of control. I recommend having a soft surface underneath you. All the rules of a regular support apply here as well, of course: keep your arms locked, don't ride the straps, and keep your shoulders active (pushing down on the rings).

Ring dip

The ring dip is a staple movement of CrossFit and one that you rarely see in other programs. Most people find that they can do only a third to half as many dips on rings as on bars. However, while you will always be able to do more bar dips, the ratio gets better as your support strength improves. The ring dip, like the support, becomes harder and harder as your technique approaches the advanced levels. This may sound counterintuitive, but beginners' first instinct is to keep their arms in tight and ride the straps. When they get off the rings, they're surprised to find red marks on their arms. I don't recommend this as a technique for ring dips. I will show the correct, and more difficult, way to do them.

In an immature ring dip, the rings are held tight to the body and turned inward, meaning the backs of the hands are facing forward. The arms are literally pushing out against the straps, causing the angle of the straps to change. If you have to brace yourself on the straps, you need to go back and work on your support position. Once that is rock solid, you'll be ready for some ring dips.

An intermediate-level dip is quite functional. The straps are now clear from the body, or just lightly touching the arms.

In a mature ring dip, the rings remain turned outward (palms forward) the whole time. This makes it much tougher, but it keeps your forearms from contacting the rings and the straps, which is required in competitive gymnastics and which, more importantly for our purposes, requires and develops greater strength, skill, and body control.

Depth is often an issue when it comes to ring dips. The CrossFit standard is "hands to your armpits." This is below 90 degrees. (Just like a full-depth squat...) If you have shoulder issues that limit your depth, work up to it slowly. My rings are height adjustable, so what I do is set them at a height where my toes just barely touch the ground at the bottom of the rep, providing an objective depth gauge for each rep. Over time, you can raise the rings in small increments until you are getting full range of motion. Equally important is making

Ring Dips (cont'd)



Immature dip

sure you lock out at the top of the rep. I won't name names, but there was a video posted on CrossFit a while ago and the commenters chewed out the performer for not locking out at the top. I don't want to see this happen to you! If it does, tell them you read someone else's article on ring dips...



Intermediate dip



Mature dip

One of the amazing things about gymnastics is that so much develops on just a small handful of foundational movements. From something as simple as a support, you can find dozens more exercises branching out from it. Stay tuned for more challenges next month.



Tyler Hass is the founder of ringtraining.com and designer and producer of the Elite Rings. His company is dedicated to spreading gymnastics into the broader fitness world. He can be reached at info@ringtraining.com.