

the
CrossFit
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Ring Row

Beginning Pulls on the Rings

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The ring row is known by many names, including body row, horizontal row, and reverse push-up. It is a valuable movement to have in your toolbox, as it provides a functional and effective horizontal pulling motion that is hard to duplicate. Its applicability to sports such as rock climbing and wrestling is fairly obvious. Its value extends to other sports as well, as a means of correcting muscle imbalances, improving midline stabilization, and training muscles that you don't see in the mirror. For gymnasts,

it provides an early stepping stone toward harder skills. Bulgarian gymnast Jordan Jovtchev describes it as a good movement for “creating the muscles for the front lever.”

It is also a great movement for developing the strength required to do a pull-up. It is a good complement to working assisted pull-ups with a stretch band or assisted pull-up machine. It is also helpful for people

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Ring Row (continued...)

who can do kipping pull-ups but struggle with strict ones. If a workout calls for pull-ups, you can scale it for non-pull-uppers by simply plugging in the ring row. For some trainees, a 1:1 substitution might be difficult, because no kipping is involved here. Start at a 1:2 or 2:3 ratio of ring rows to pull-ups, and see how it modifies the character of the workout for a given trainee, and adjust accordingly. You can also change up the difficulty of the ring row by altering the angle of the body. As your body angle increases, the difficulty of the movement decreases. For a beginner, it is fine to perform them from nearly a standing position. At the advanced level, your body will be perfectly horizontal.

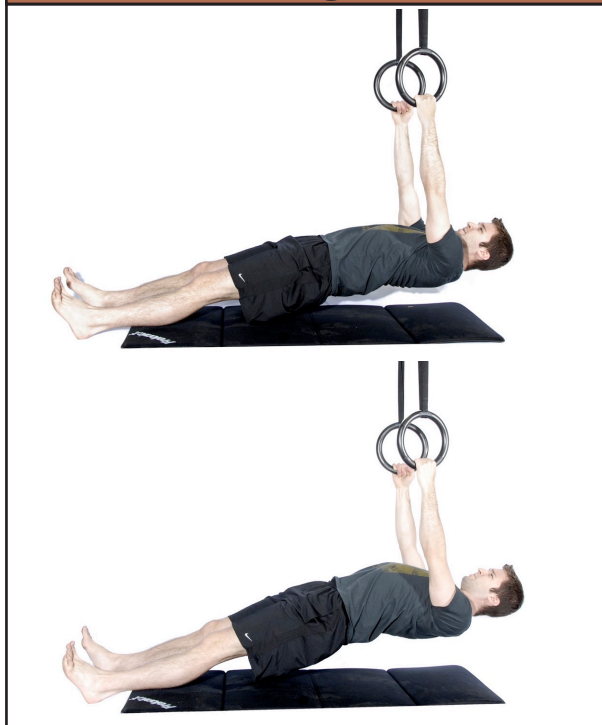
Technical execution of the ring row

One of the alternative names for the ring row gives insight into its technical execution: the ring row is essentially a push-up in reverse. (The same lessons we learned in *CrossFit Journal* issue 7 for the push-up also apply to the ring row.) Midline stabilization is a critical component of both movements. The goal is to keep the body tight and straight. Unlike the kipping pull-up, which uses the core of the body as a power generator, in the ring row the body is kept rock solid, just as in a perfect push-up.

Begin by practicing the horizontal shrug. With your feet on the ground and arms held straight, using only your back muscles, pull your chest forward as high as possible and then back down. The arms do not bend at any point during the horizontal shrug. Once you have this movement down and can feel how to initiate the pull from the upper back, you are ready to work the full movement.

The pulling motion goes from core to extremity, beginning with contraction of the scapulae, drawing the shoulder blades together and the shoulders back. Next, drive the elbows back, brushing them past the rib cage, and pull with the arms until the chest passes through the rings. While I have described these as distinct phases of the pull, the overall motion should be smooth. Return to full extension at the bottom position, maintaining a straight body. Do not worry about the distinction between a pull-up (pronated) and chin-up (supinated) grip. Since you are holding onto rings, and not a bar, you are free to adjust the grip dynamically throughout the movement to what you find most comfortable.

Horizontal shrug



Full movement



Ring Row (continued...)

It is important to note that this movement is not a bodyweight biceps curl! The curl involves only flexion in the elbow joint. It is not initiated from the core. It begins and ends at the elbow joint. Let's leave curls to the guys at Globo Gym wearing the neon spandex unitards.

Variations on the ring row

Several variations of the ring row exist, expanding the movement to suit a variety of skill levels. The first is the crunch and row, which scales down the difficulty considerably, while still maintaining functionality. The crunch and row is performed from a seated position. It looks a lot like an assisted sit-up. The ab and hip flexors are assisting your upper back and arms (and vice versa) to complete the movement.

To increase the difficulty, try the elevated ring row, in which the feet are raised level with or above the rings. It is the same movement as the standard ring row, but you are now pulling a greater percentage of your body weight.

Next month, we will dig into some more variations on the ring row, including some unique twists you might not expect. Start building your strength now, because it only gets harder from here.



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.

Crunch and row



Elevated ring row



Key points on the ring row

1. Straight, tight body
2. Don't leave your hips behind (piking)
3. Don't lead with your hips (arching)
4. Pull is slow and smooth
5. Never short the range of motion ("All the way down; all the way up.")
6. Pull from core to extremity: back, then shoulders, then arms
7. This is not a curl!



Straight, tight body. No arch.



This is not a curl!