

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Kipping Pull-up Progression

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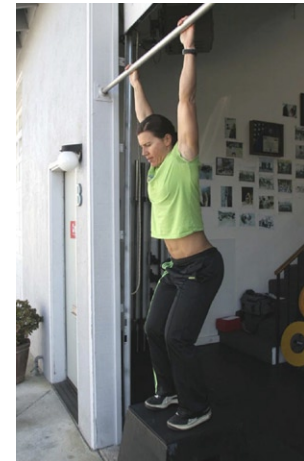
If you haven't heard all the debates about the kipping pull-up versus the strict pull-up, you should probably spend some time on the CrossFit.com message board doing a bit of homework. Searching for "kipping" or "kipping pull-up" will return many threads, but the granddaddy of them all is <http://www.crossfit.com/cgi-bin/discus/discus.cgi?pg=prev&topic=22&page=9021>.

If you are already familiar with the debates, you undoubtedly know that the kipping pull-up is king. The question most beginners ask is, How can I learn to kip when I don't even have one pull-up? The answer is that it's possible to learn the movement with assistance. Often students who already have a number of strict pull-ups have the most trouble learning the kipping pull-up because it is necessary for them to break old, counterproductive habits first.

I developed this teaching progression by teaching myself how to kip and then trying the movements with my clients at CrossFit Santa Cruz. The progression has been surprisingly successful with practically every student who has employed it. Mastering the kipping pull-up is not only fun but also incredibly functional and powerful, and it will take minutes off many of your Workout of the Day (WOD) times.

Instructions

1) Stand on a box or bench directly beneath your pull-up bar and grab the bar with your hands wider than your shoulders but narrower than in your snatch grip. The easiest grip to use is the front grip (palms away from you), but you should eventually learn and use all the grips: front, back, and mixed.



Tip: The height of your box should be such that you can hang off the bar with a quarter-depth squat. If you have the choice of having too much height or too little, go for too much; you'll need to be able to bend your knees beneath you.

2) Practice the swing. Leave your feet on the box, bend your knees so that your arms hang straight from the bar and your shoulders are extended, and rock from heel to toe, bringing the hips back and forth respectively. Push the chest out along with the hips when you swing forward (into an arched position) and cave the chest in when you swing back (into a "hollow" position). Establish some rhythm and link at least five reps together before advancing to the next step.

Bonus: This movement helps develop shoulder flexibility, along with gymnastics training and Olympic lifting skill-transfer exercises such as overhead squats, snatch balances, rack jerks, and the like.

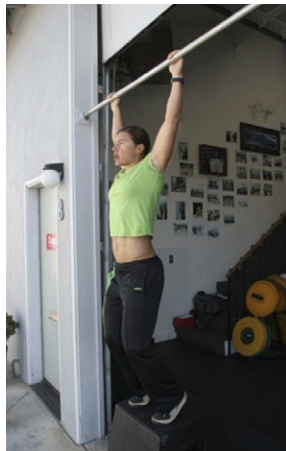
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Kipping Pull-up Progression (continued...)

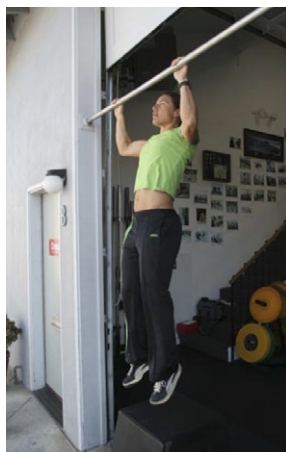


bar, is the key to adding speed to the cycle, propelling yourself into the forward part of the swing, and linking one kipping pull-up to the next. It creates just the right curve to maximize the speed of the descent into the “hips forward chest out” phase of the movement. [For a mathematical discussion of why this maximizes the speed, see the pages on brachistochrone curves at <http://curvebank.calstatela.edu/brach/brach.htm>]. The push should be aggressive, initiating a fast swing; do not slow the descent or try to “muscle” through the bottom of the swing. Repeat the cycle to link several together and you’ve got it! For those who don’t yet have an unassisted pull-up, this is the way you should do pull-ups in the WOD.

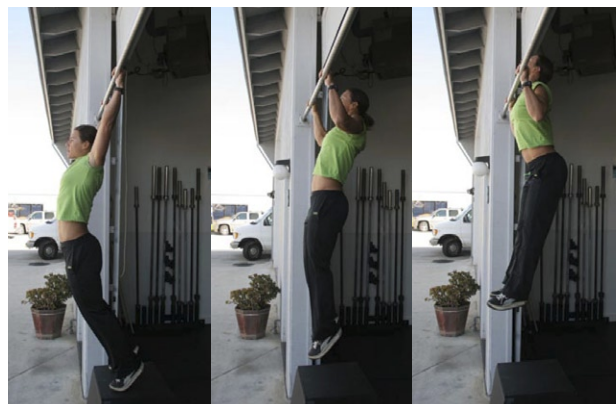
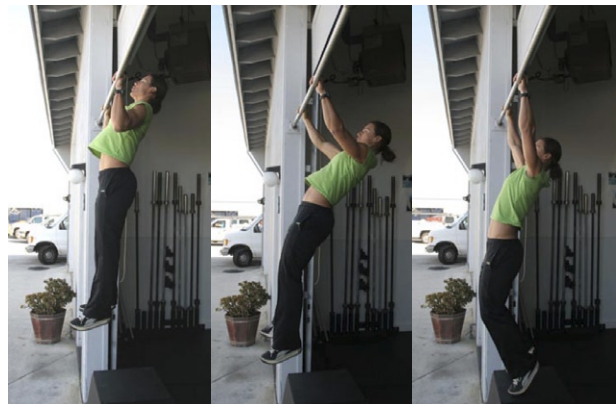
3) Next, add a jumping pull-up. As your head passes under the bar and you are rolling back on your heels, jump until your chin is over the bar, then let yourself drop down onto the box. Catch yourself with your feet, with bent knees, and immediately drive your hips and chest forward into the front part of the swing, maintaining foot contact with the box. Once again, when you can link five reps together, you may move on to the next step.



4) Pushing your face and shoulders horizontally back away from the bar at the top of the jumping pull-up stroke, just as you get your chin above the



5) Once you have mastered the rhythm of the movement and feel you have gained some strength, start taking a bit of weight off your feet. It is a good idea to try your first unassisted kipping pull-up when you are fresh. Hang from the bar, swing a couple times, initiating with the hips and chest (not the feet!) and hit it! Most people who achieve one are so excited they don’t want to leave the bar.



Kipping Pull-up Progression (continued...)

Troubleshooting

Problem: Trainee not able to get chin over the bar.

Solution: Higher box. I have found that stacking 18-inch-diameter bumper plates on the box is a stable way to incrementally add height.

Problem: Strict puller trying to muscle through the movement instead of swinging. You will identify this when you see a trainee arching the back through the whole movement and slowing the descent.



Solution: Have the trainee pike slightly in the jumping portion of the movement, and insist on a quicker descent.

Problem: Dropping straight down after getting the chin over, often losing momentum at the bottom of the move.

Solution: The trainee is not pushing horizontally away from the bar at the chin-over portion of the movement. Communicate that this push must be aggressive!

Problem: Trainee performs the whole movement without getting his or her face within four inches of the bar. It appears as if he or she is floating behind the bar.

Solution: Earlier jump. The jump should happen just as the trainee passes backward under the bar. Also make sure the trainee isn't pushing away from the bar before getting the chin over. Is the box too short? Raise it if needed. Make sure the box is high enough for the trainee to bend the knees and get a good jump.

Remember, rhythm and instinct are important in this movement. There are times when you just need to let trainees experiment for themselves. If they appear tired and overly frustrated, stop and come back to it another day. It is amazing what a few days of mental processing can do! And, finally, take advantage of the digital coaching portion of the message board (<http://www.crossfit.com/discus/messages/13350/13350.html>); there is a huge wealth of knowledge there.

Other CrossFit resources on the kipping pull-up

- Video of the teaching progression described in this article is at <http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/eva-on-kipping.wmv>.
- Video showing the speed of kipping pull-ups compared to strict ones is at <http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/strict-kip.wmv>.
- A thoughtful, informative community discussion of the merits of the kipping pull-up is at <http://www.crossfit.com/cgi-bin/discus/discus.cgi?pg=prev&topic=22&page=9021>.
- Issue 32 (April 2005) of the *CrossFit Journal* features an article by Greg Glassman on the kipping pull-up.