

2. CLEAR THE BAR: MASTER THE PULL-UP

Remember those preternaturally fit kids who could nail the pull-up test back in middle school? There's still time to join their ranks — even if you were one of the many youngsters who had to settle with the “bent-arm hang” back in the day.

As with any fitness goal, the key is to get there a little bit at a time. That's pretty straightforward when you're talking about lifting an external weight like a barbell: Just start with a light weight and build up. But you've got to get creative when you're working with a fixed quantity like your body weight.

Fortunately, Krista Scott-Dixon, PhD, founder of the women's resistance training site www.stumptuous.com, has some clever ways to make pull-ups more accessible. “You might think you could never get your chin over that bar, even with a drill sergeant yelling at you,” she says. “But with a gradual, progressive program, you can — and you will.”

You can get your chin over the bar in one of two ways: either with an underhand grip, usually called a “chin-up,” or an overhand grip, usually called a “pull-up.” From here on out, we'll be using the term “pull-up” — but choose the grip where you feel strongest. Master one and other variations will come! Meanwhile, use the suggested variations and “Ready to Advance” guidelines to evolve your strength and form.

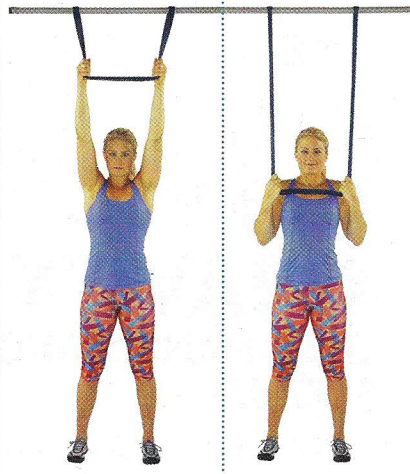
OR
LAT PULL-DOWN MACHINE

OR
PULL-UP ASSIST MACHINE

THE PROGRAM

PHASE ONE

STANDING LAT PULL-DOWN



- Fold a length of elastic band over a pull-up bar and stand under it, holding the doubled-up band in each hand. Bend your knees slightly.
- Grab the band with your hands about shoulder-width apart or a little wider.
- Pull the band down to the top of your chest, so that your hands are near your armpits.
- Slowly return the band to the starting position.

Sets and Reps: Two to three sets of eight to 10 reps, two or three times a week.

Ready to Advance: When you can comfortably use a thicker band, and pull it all the way to the top of your chest.

PHASE TWO

BAND-ASSISTED PULL-UP



- Secure an exercise band in a loop around the top of a pull-up bar so the band hangs down in a “U” shape.
- Place one knee through the band (stand on a bench or box if necessary), which will act as a counterweight and give you a boost during the exercise.
- Minimizing swinging in the lower body, pull yourself up until your chin clears the bar.
- Lower yourself under control.

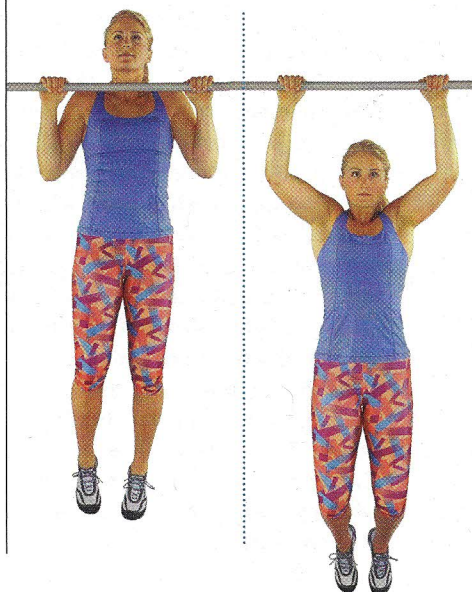
Sets and Reps: Two to three sets of five to eight reps.

Ready to Advance: When you can do five solid assisted reps.

PHASE THREE

ECCENTRIC PULL-UP

KNOWN AS
NEGATIVES



- Grab the pull-up bar with your grip of choice (stand on a bench or box if necessary).
- Hop directly to the top position of a pull-up, arms fully bent and chin over the bar.
- Lower yourself down as slowly as possible, trying for a slow three or four count on the way down.

Sets and Reps: Two or three sets of three to five. (Do these in addition to one or two sets of standing lat pull-downs or band-assisted pull-ups.)

Ready to Advance: When you can do four or five slow, controlled reps. →

