

Press Ups are king!....

Anyone that has trained with me will already know that I love Press Ups!

The muscles that are recruited during the movement play an important role in striking. As a result, most fighting styles incorporate them to some degree into their strength and conditioning regime. What is surprising however is that many people fail to realise exactly how tough press ups are. Especially to new or poorly conditioned students. Many instructors also assume that everyone is born knowing how to perform a perfect press up. The reality is that most people have never been taught how to properly execute this supposedly easy, basic movement.

The primary movers [the major muscle groups that produce the motion of a push-up] are the chest and triceps. However, if you look at the form your body takes during a perfect push-up, pretty much all of the muscles between your hands and your toes/ knee's are engaged to some degree.

When you perform the full press up (Fig 1), you are lifting approximately 75% of your body weight and in the modified press up position (Fig 3), you are lifting approximately 60% of your body weight. Few people new to exercise would select this weight on a fixed machine in a gym. Let alone try to bang out enormous numbers of reps! However, because many people perceive this movement as 'basic' we expect everyone to be able to do it. As a result many people that perform the movement find it really difficult, feel demoralised and as a result their technique worsens in order for them to be able to achieve more repetitions.

When selecting the type of press up you are going to perform it is important to take into account not only the sex of the student but also their exercise history and physical make up. As an example, a taller person will require significantly more lower back and core strength than a shorter person to maintain proper body alignment. As a result it may be necessary to allow the student to slowly build their strength in these areas (that's another article) before they progress to the standard version. As an instructor it is as important to encourage correct form and progression in our fitness training as it is in our martial arts.

There are two common variations of the standard exercise, one for the more advanced exerciser – though it's the definition of the press up – and a modified version that is slightly easier often mistakenly referred to as the 'girly version'.

Standard Press Up

1. Starting push-up position (figure 2) Lie chest-down with your hands at shoulder level, palms flat on the floor and slightly more than shoulder-width apart, your feet together and parallel to each other.
2. Look forward rather than down at the floor. The first contact you make with the floor with any part of the face should be your chin, not your nose.
3. Keep your legs straight and your toes tucked under your feet.
4. Straighten your arms as you push your body up off the floor.(figure 1) Keep your palms fixed at the same position and keep your body straight. Try not to bend or arch your upper or lower back as you push up.
5. Exhale as your arms straighten out.
6. Pause for a moment.
7. Lower your body slowly towards the floor. Bend your arms and keep your palms in fixed position. Keep body straight and feet together.
8. Lower body until chest touches the floor. Try not to bend your back. Keep your knees off the floor, and inhale as you bend your arms.

9. Pause for a moment. Begin straightening your arms for a second push-up. Exhale as you raise your body.

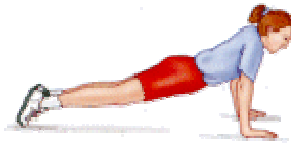


Figure 1



Figure 2

Modified Press Up

This movement is performed as above but starting from a kneeling position.

Points to watch are:

- Ankles can be crossed or together
- Avoid allowing your hips to sag and bottom out (touch floor)
- Your hips will need to move forward as you lower. Keeping your hips back puts more pressure on your shoulders and less on the chest and arms (cheating!)
- Your chin or nose should come down more or less in line with or slightly in front of your finger tips.

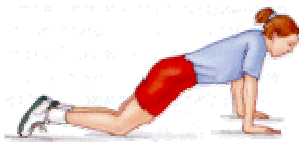


Figure 3



Figure 4

Now that is a standard press up, obviously there are hundreds of types of press up. All designed to hit the muscles with from different angles and with different degree's of intensity. In addition other variables such as speed, repetition, range of movement and recover can be manipulated to give different exercise results.

So in conclusion, maybe it's time we looked at this old favorite from a new perspective. Not just using it as a way of enforcing discipline but instead integrating it properly into our workouts. Ultimately press ups are a very versatile movement that can help improve a martial artists speed, strength and muscular endurance.

I use the table below as a guide to progression. As I have already stated there are many variables to be taken into account when monitoring progress. It's not an exact science but it is a fun useful tool neither the less.

Full Body Press Ups (Fig 5)

Age	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
20 - 29	>48	34 - 38	17 - 33	6 - 16	<6
30 - 39	>39	25 - 39	12 - 24	4 - 11	<4
40 - 49	>34	20 - 34	8 - 19	3 - 7	<3
50 - 59	>29	15 - 29	6 - 14	2 - 5	<2
60+	>19	5 - 19	3 - 4	1- 2	<1

Modified Push Ups (Fig 6)

Age	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
20 - 29	>54	45 - 54	35 - 44	20 - 34	<20
30 - 39	>44	35 - 44	25 - 34	15 - 24	<15
40 - 49	>39	30 - 39	20 - 29	12 - 19	<12
50 - 59	>34	25 - 34	15 - 24	8 - 14	<8
60+	>29	20 - 29	10 - 19	5 - 9	<5

Have a go and let me know what you think.

Remember quality over quantity!!

Darren Norris