

These positions are illustrated from 12:00 with the front lever, 3:00 with the straddle planche, 6:00 with the back lever, and 9:00 with the iron cross. In the front lever, you can see that the hands will be pulling down toward the center of the range of motion of the body. This indicates a pulling exercise. We can also confirm this by the fact that it primarily works the pulling muscles of the body—such as the latissimus dorsi, teres major, and pectoralis major (lats, teres major, pecs). Likewise, in the back lever and iron cross, the arms are pulling down toward the center of mass the entire time. Conversely, in the planche, the hands are pushing down and away from the body in order to hold it above the rings.

Furthermore, pushing and pulling exercises can be distinguished into two separate categories: vertical/horizontal pushing and vertical/horizontal pulling.

- **Vertical Pushing** – This includes two sets of movements, each at the opposite end of the range of motion—such as handstands, overhead presses, handstand presses and dips.
- **Horizontal Pushing** – This includes several different types of pushup variations and planche variations.
- **Vertical Pulling** – This includes pull-ups and inverted pull-up variations, as well as isometrics—such as iron crosses.
- **Horizontal Pulling** – This includes any and all rowing variations, as well as isometrics—such as back lever and front lever.

Generally, most people will see there are two types of vertical pushing exercises and be confused about which one they should choose: dips or handstand pushup variations. For most new athletes, I suggest beginning with dips, until a greater level of proficiency in strength is attained. Fundamentally, dips are one of the best upper-body pushing exercises for brute strength, and an excellent comparison would be that they are similar to an upper-body squat. Dips will help to build primary pushing strength and overall muscle volume, which ensures a good base for further exercise. Since handstands are usually included as skill work in most beginner routines (in order to familiarize athletes with upside-down and inverted motions), handstands are not neglected from training entirely. Thus, the routine is still balanced, while providing experience for the new athletes in all ranges of motion of the shoulder.

One exception is that there are a fair amount of straight-arm techniques in bodyweight strength training over barbells. I want to clarify the methods of integrating these different planes of motion when choosing exercises for certain goals. First, there is very little “elbows out” in bodyweight strength training, unlike what you typically see with barbell and dumbbell pressing. The reason for this is that flaring the elbows leads to a lack of control in many of the movements. For example, if you flare the elbows out in handstands or handstand pushups, you will fall over almost immediately during the exercises. The elbows need to be tucked in because the body is the lever that needs to be balanced.

