

The Armstrong Pull-up Program

This program was developed by Major Charles Lewis Armstrong. Major Armstrong developed this workout to prepare him to set a new world record in number of pull-ups completed in a single exercise session.

The program provides the necessities for any successful physical improvement regime, namely variety, overload and regularity. Users have achieved remarkable results in only 6-8 weeks. This means that most, if not all, have been able to achieve the performance level they desired, a set of 20 repetitions, as long as they are consistent with the program. It cannot be overemphasized that this program depends upon regularity. Daily performance of the exercises listed in the following paragraphs holds the true key to reaching and maintaining the 20-repetition level.

The Morning Routine

Each morning, perform 3 maximum effort sets of normal push-ups. This is very important!! The push-up is one of the best exercises for strengthening the entire set of muscles making up the shoulder girdle. Major Armstrong described this morning routine in the following manner: After rising, I would drop to the deck and do my first set of push-ups. I would then move into the head and start my morning toilet. I would return after a few minutes and do my second maximum effort set after which, I would go back into the head and shave. After shaving I would return to the bedroom and complete the third and final set. Having completed all of the push-ups, I was awake and ready for a relaxing shower.

This routine should be followed during the entire training period. Since it takes most of us at least four weeks to reach our goals, you will probably find that you have inadvertently established a morning routine that is easy enough to keep as a lifetime habit. If not you will at least appreciate the morning shower a little more. I have noted that the push-up routine helps to alleviate any soreness during the first couple of weeks. I recommend that you use the push-up routine every day during this period so that you feel more comfortable during your initial adjustment to this regime of exercises.

Training Regimen

The following represents the heart of the training program. I recommend that you do not attempt the pull-ups until two to three hours after the push-up routine is completed. The program is conveniently divided into five training days. This is easily translated into a Monday to Friday training schedule. It is important to cease the pull-ups for two days, Saturday and Sunday. Further it is necessary to use consecutive days (not to skip days) when on the pull-up routine. Finally, it is obviously more important to do the pull-ups than the push-ups.

This training program was specifically designed to improve performance in the overhand pull-up (palms facing away). The overhand method is the preferred method, but for now do what you need to in order to complete the most repetitions for your PFT. Mix up your training between underhand and overhand until you can do twenty both ways. The program depends upon quality exercises – number of repetitions are secondary. When you are doing these exercises, you should concentrate on perfect execution of each repetition. The only person you can fool with less than your best is yourself.

Day 1

Five maximum effort sets. Rest 90 seconds between each set. Do not concern yourself with numbers. You will find that you increase the numbers in the last two sets before you see much improvement in the first three. Make sure that each set is a maximum effort set.

Day 2

Pyramid day. Start the pyramid with one repetition, the next set has two, and the next set has three. Continue in this fashion until you miss a set (e.g. your last set was four then five, your next set should be six but you only do four repetitions. You missed the set) Do one more set at maximum effort. Rest 10 seconds for each repetition in the previous set.

Day 3

Do three training sets (training sets are defined later) with a normal grip (palms away or toward you, hands slightly wider than shoulder width). Rest 60 seconds between each set. Slide your hands together and palms toward you so your little fingers are 0-4 inches apart and complete three more training sets resting 60 seconds between each set. Finally do three training sets with a wide overhand grip (palms facing away) resting 60 seconds between each set.

Day 4

Do the maximum number of training sets that you can accomplish. Rest 60 seconds between each set. You do training sets until you fail to do a perfect training set. This day can wind up being the longest training day as you continue with the program because you will find it easy to do lots of training sets. If you can do more than nine training sets, increase by one repetition next week.

Day 5

Repeat the day that you found to be the hardest in the previous four days. This may change from week to week. You can also try to doing weighted pull-ups or a pull-up assist machine for this day.

Training Sets

Training sets are easy to define, but require some experimentation to determine for the individual participating in the program. A training set has a specified number of repetitions. That means that one individual may have seven repetitions in his training set, but another could have more or less. The key to determining the proper number of repetitions in a training set comes on day 3. You must perform 9 training sets that day. If you only do 12 repetitions on a max effort set, then your training set would probably only be 1-3 repetitions. Remember, it is much more important that you complete all nine sets than doing an extra rep and only completing 6 or 7 sets. Day 3 calls for you to do nine training sets. Adjust your training set so that you can complete this routine properly. The best gauge for the number of repetitions in a training set comes on day 4. If you successfully complete day 3, try increasing the number of repetitions in your training set by one when you do day 4. If you complete at least 9 training sets, then you know your training set should be that higher number. If you do less than nine sets, stick with the number you used for day 3.

It is important that you do not change the repetitions in a training set in midstream. When you schedule yourself to do the day's routine using three repetitions in your training set, do not change it to two when the exercises get hard. If you miss, you miss. There is always tomorrow.

Modifications

Ladies will find that this program adapts well to the flexed arm hang. Training sets are simply translated into hang times.

Chin-ups may be substituted for those who prefer this technique, however, day 3 must still be completed exactly as described with 6 sets done with the overhand grip.

It is highly recommended that you follow this program using overhand grip as most of the obstacles that you will have to get over at OCS require an overhand grip.

Final Thoughts

This program will work for anyone who makes a sincere effort. You may notice a drop in your maximum effort set. This is a normal physiological reaction called "tear down." As you continue, you will improve. Most of my midshipmen were able to reach the 20-repetition level in a short period of time. They started the program able to do only twelve to fifteen repetitions. If you are not at this level, it will take longer than four weeks to reach 20 repetitions. However, if you stay with the program, you will reach this goal. Disclaimer: It is very important to note that none of these physical training programs should be started by anyone until you have consulted a licensed physician and you are told you are medically qualified to begin this specific type of physical training.