

Aligned by Karin Dimitrovova

Welcome to Aligned!



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Handstand Fundamentals

This section contains everything you need to know about handstand alignment.

Beware!! If you're a beginner, even being upside down is a struggle. That is absolutely fine! Handstand is a work in progress and trying to obsess and micromanage every single detail will not gonna give you any advantage. Quite the opposite - it adds onto the frustration.

So read this manual, but take it with a grain of salt for now and come back to it once you feel like you need to.

Hand Placement

The index finger is facing forward parallel to one another. Other fingers are placed next to each other - a common mistake is to try to spread your fingers too wide away from one another - this is not the best, as it actually makes the hand structure weak. Fingers should not be right next to each other though, rather choose for a healthy balance, you shouldn't feel strain.

The index and middle finger have the most power, so we rely on them in terms of balance, other fingers are not much important. When pressing down in a handstand, try to press into your first knuckle (index finger) the most.

Spider Fingers

This seemingly minor change can do absolute wonders for your balance and help you BIG TIME on your upside down journey. That magical little adjustment that has the possibility to change your handstand game is called "Spider Fingers".

Spider fingers look like this:



See how I'm gripping the mat here? I'm gripping so much my knuckles are basically turning white. Why? Think about it like this: What do you do with your feet when you're falling over? You press your toes down. That's exactly what you should do with your hands in a handstand when you're falling over, because hands act the same way as your feet do when you're upside down.

The difference between standing on your feet versus on your hands is just the fact that you have been doing it your whole life and therefore you are not paying attention to these slight tweaks. But it doesn't mean you're not doing it nevertheless. You just do it without thinking about it.

So whenever you're falling over in a handstand, you should press your fingers down like there's no tomorrow!

But!! If you're not falling over, be careful about pressing too hard - pressing too much will just make you fall back from your handstand. If you're stable, light squeeze towards you is more than enough (knuckles lifted). It's all about the balance between pushing too much and not enough.

Keep elbows locked

The best is to try to stretch the arm and have straight elbows - even locked. Like that, joints have the best potential of being properly stacked one above each other. It is common to bend the elbows a bit in a beginning (some people feel more secure in their shoulders then). Bent elbows can be also a sign of not enough shoulder mobility - if that's you, work on your mobility and keep practicing even if elbows are bent. It's nothing that can't change with time.

Shoulders

Scapula should be in elevation, you should aim for bringing your shoulders towards the ears. It will feel easier for some to have scapula rest in depression but the more active the shoulder and the scapula is, the more we have influence over our balance.

Spine & Core

Spine should be in a neutral position (no backbend or tension in your spine) and core is only slightly engaged. One of the biggest mistakes people do is trying to bring the "hollow body position" into a handstand and thinking that the core needs to be crazily active

in an upside down shape. The only thing it causes is tighter shoulders and not being able to stack your joints on top of each other. Basically, you will have to work extra hard to hold your handstand shape like that.

Slight core activation is necessary - you can either achieve that consciously or usually it will come naturally with enough handstand practice. Light core activation means bringing the belly a tiny bit in and up. It's a very slight engagement that should still enable you to move and breathe.

When beginning your handstand practice, it is very hard to even think about your core and its activation, I personally do not bring it up usually as one of the cues, because there are simply more important things to focus on than the actual core (such as shoulders or hands).

Legs

Legs and butt are strongly squeezed together. "Squeeze your butt" is quite good cue that also brings up the core activation. Try to squeeze your butt now and you will feel that your core has become slightly active, that is exactly what I've been talking in the paragraph above.

Gaze

Where you look influences your handstand A LOT. If you're looking too forward, you're messing up with the neutral curve of your spine and even getting into a handstand is going to be a struggle. If you're looking through and you do not have your gaze on the ground, you're going to have trouble balancing as finding a stable point to look at is key.

Instead, look on the ground right between your palms. Imagine there's a line between your thumbs and look in the middle of that line.

Monitor your practice

Your journal (or note section in your phone) should become your new next friend in the next 2 months. I cannot stress enough how important it is to keep track of your handstand progress. Read my recommendations:

1) Take notes

Keep track on your handstand attempts, the successes and failures. Try to be as objective as possible here and emotionally detach yourself from the outcome. This is not supposed to make you frustrated (everybody sucks at the beginning), you will be amazed how much you're going to progress in two months of training. Keep taking notes so you can evaluate at the end. Also include how is your body feeling day to day. This might help you with deciding if you want to scale back on the training that week (the structure in the program is a recommended one, but listen to your body first!).

2) Take videos

Taking videos is essential. Ideally take the videos from the back so you can evaluate how is your line developing and what to work on. On video you might see things you haven't been attentive to while in a handstand, such as your toes not being pointed or your shoulders not being elevated. Again, everybody sucks at the beginning, do not be hard on yourself. Keep practicing and see your line and stability improve.

Feel free to post your videos and progress in our [Facebook Group](#) to get some valuable pointers from me and the community and to inspire others to handstand!

Time investment

Even though there is a structure to follow, I encourage you to find what works best for you and your schedule and go with that, rather than to try to follow the outlined structure to a T. We're all different and at different point at our journeys, so try to listen to your body as much as possible.

What matters the most is that you have focus during your practice. If you do not feel like today is your day, feel free to skip a day. The structure is usually 4 handstand training days a week. It is recommended to practice anywhere from 3-5x a week, so feel free to adjust this to your needs.

What if you do not have so much time to devote to your practice that day?

The handstand training days are usually 45-60 minutes long. I understand that some days, this can be a bit too much for what you have going on. If that's the case, do your warm-up do one set of Strength & Movement Workout (or skip it all together) and focus on handstand drills. That way, you can be done in under 30 minutes. If that's still too much, simply scale back on the sets of your handstand training, but stick to your warm-up! 20 minutes and you're done.

Progressive Overload

The term Progressive Overload is mostly used in a strength training community and says that in order to progress one needs to be gradually increasing volume, frequency or intensity. This concept can be also applied to your handstand training. That's why, as weeks progress, the training gets a bit more demanding.

You will see that most of the handstand drills in the later weeks have a note "apply progressive overload" and offer only a range in terms of reps. What I want you to do in that case is go back to your handstand journal, look up how many reps you did last time during that exercise and try to add 3-5 reps. That way, you ensure that you will always push the body a bit more and you will continue to get better.

Important! If you feel tired and sluggish that way and your handstand practice suffers, do not try to push past that. Simply accept it as a "bad day", do what you can and move on.

Intensity & Rest periods

Handstand is quite an interesting move as it combines two things together - strength (being able to actually hold yourself in an upside down position and therefore having reasonably strong shoulders and wrists) and skill.

Because of that, sometimes it can be hard to understand when to push and when to rest. To gain strength, one needs to be pushing the limits, while to learn skill, one needs to keep the focus. Not only that, at the beginning, getting out of a handstand might be a task that takes lots of energy, so it's important to think about that and not go past the point of exhaustion where it would be unsafe to exit the handstand (good example is Chest to Wall and your ability to walk yourself away from the wall if you cannot cartwheel out yet).

I have purposely split the handstand portion into two parts - handstand CONDITIONING and handstand DRILLS. The reason for that is mostly for you to understand that the purpose of those two differs. Conditioning is mostly for you to build up strength, while during drills it's best to focus on your form and keep your focus (although they of course build strength too). In conditioning you can push yourself a bit more (although again, have enough energy in the tank for safe exits) and in drills allow yourself longer rest periods between sets and even reps if you need to. Do not try to be finished as quick as possible! Rather try to stay present and go slow.

Week 1: Introduction & Schedule

This is what WEEK 1 is about...

Week 1 is all about testing the waters, focusing on strength and trying that first handstand or balancing upside down. This week is for everyone, no matter if you're starting from ground zero or you do have some handstand experience. Expect drills to build up strength and find your first seconds of balance in the air.

SCHEDULE

You will be alternating between Handstand Session A and B. Warm-up session is the same for the whole week, while strength & movement session and handstand drills are changing.

The schedules below are for easier orientation in the program. Also later in the game you might be able to remember the warm-ups and the drills, so videos might not be needed or you might want to take your practice to the gym. This schedule enables you to do that.

Week 1: Handstand Session A

WEEK 1: HANDSTAND SESSION A

1) HANDSTAND WARM UP (no. 1)

Head Circles	5x
Shoulder Circles	10x each direction
Hands, all directions	30sec.
Rocking Hands (fingers forward)	10x
Rocking Hands (fingers back)	10x
Flat Hands to Fists	10x
Wrist Massage	30sec.
Wrist Flexion Raises	10x
Shake the Hands	10sec.
Wrist Flexion Raises	10x
Wrist Circles	30sec, both directions
Shoulder Opener - 3 Ways	1 minute total

2) STRENGTH & MOVEMENT WORKOUT (no. 1)

Up and Down Legs	10x each leg
Scapula Push-Ups	10x
Frog Jumps	10x

Do 3 sets in total

3) HANDSTAND CONDITIONING

L-holds	30sec. or until failure, 3 sets
---------	---------------------------------

4) HANDSTAND DRILLS

Wall Kick Up	5-10 reps each leg
One Foot Away Balance	10 tries

Do 3 sets in total (first finish both drills, then repeat)

TOTAL TIME ESTIMATE: about 45 minutes

Week 1: Handstand Session B

WEEK 1: HANDSTAND SESSION B

1) HANDSTAND WARM UP (no. 1)

Head Circles	5x
Shoulder Circles	10x each direction
Hands, all directions	30sec.
Rocking Hands (fingers forward)	10x
Rocking Hands (fingers back)	10x
Flat Hands to Fists	10x
Wrist Massage	30sec.
Wrist Flexion Raises	10x
Shake the Hands	10sec.
Wrist Flexion Raises	10x
Wrist Circles	30sec, both directions
Shoulder Opener - 3 Ways	1 minute total

2) STRENGTH & MOVEMENT WORKOUT (no. 2)

Hollowbody Hold	30sec.
Sitting on Heels to Press	10x
Weight Shifting	6x

Do 3 sets in total

3) HANDSTAND CONDITIONING

Wall Walks	2 - 5x, 2 sets
------------	----------------

4) HANDSTAND DRILLS

Wall Kick Up	5 reps each leg
Changing Legs Kick Up	10 reps total, change leading legs
One Foot Away Balance	10 tries total

Do 3 sets in total (first finish all three drills, then repeat)

TOTAL TIME ESTIMATE: about 45 minutes

Week 1 / Day 1 - Handstand Session (1A)

1) Handstand Warm-up #1

Handstand Warm-up is vital before practicing handstands. Think of it as preparation and strength training for your joints - wrists and shoulders. They are the ones to carry all the load so make sure not to skip this part.



2) Strength & Movement Session #1

This quick and effective strength & movement session will activate your muscles (especially core and upper body) and prepare you for your upside down journey.



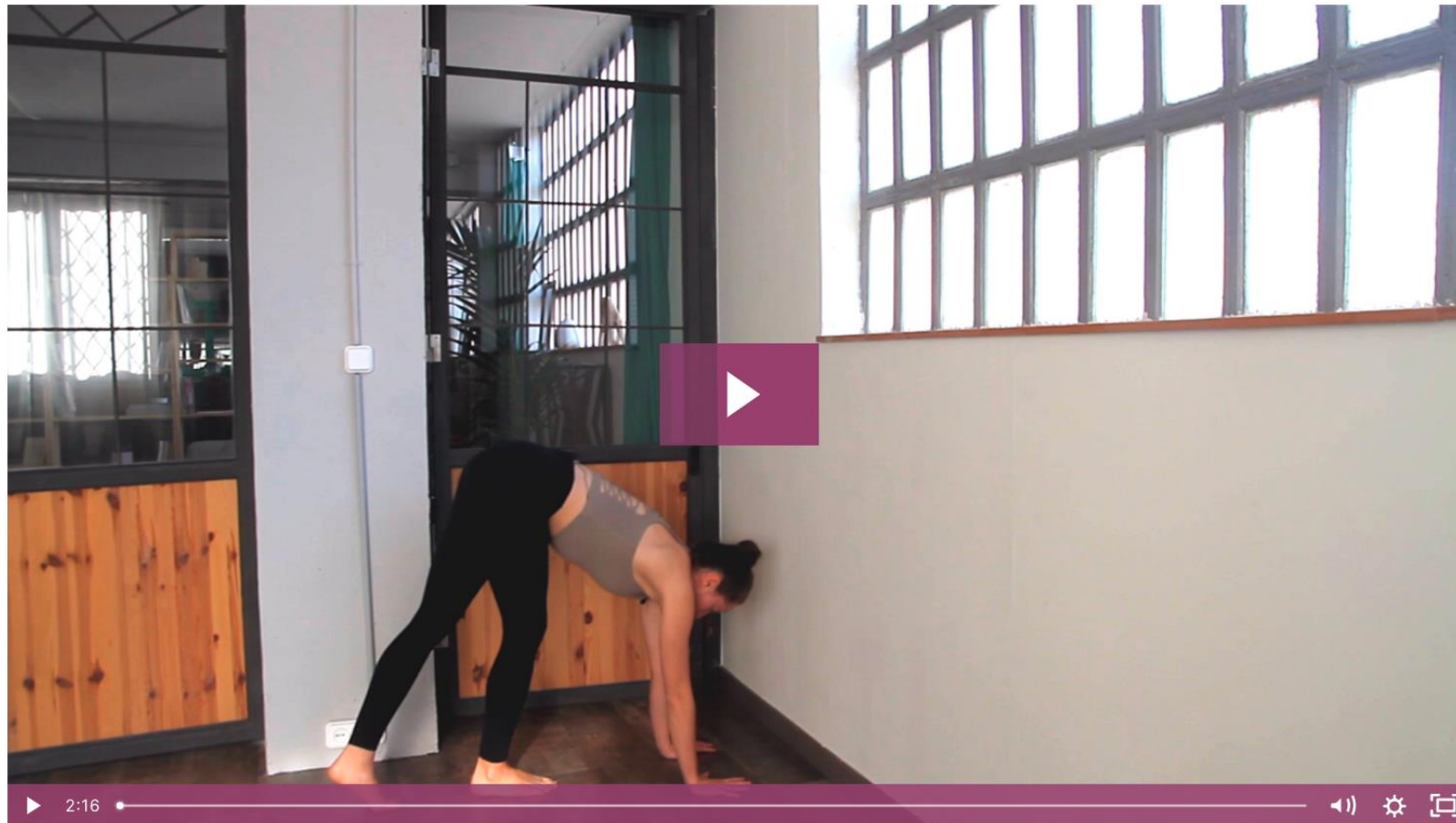
3) Handstand Conditioning: L-hold

Perform 3 sets of 30s holds. If 30 seconds is too much, then hold until failure.



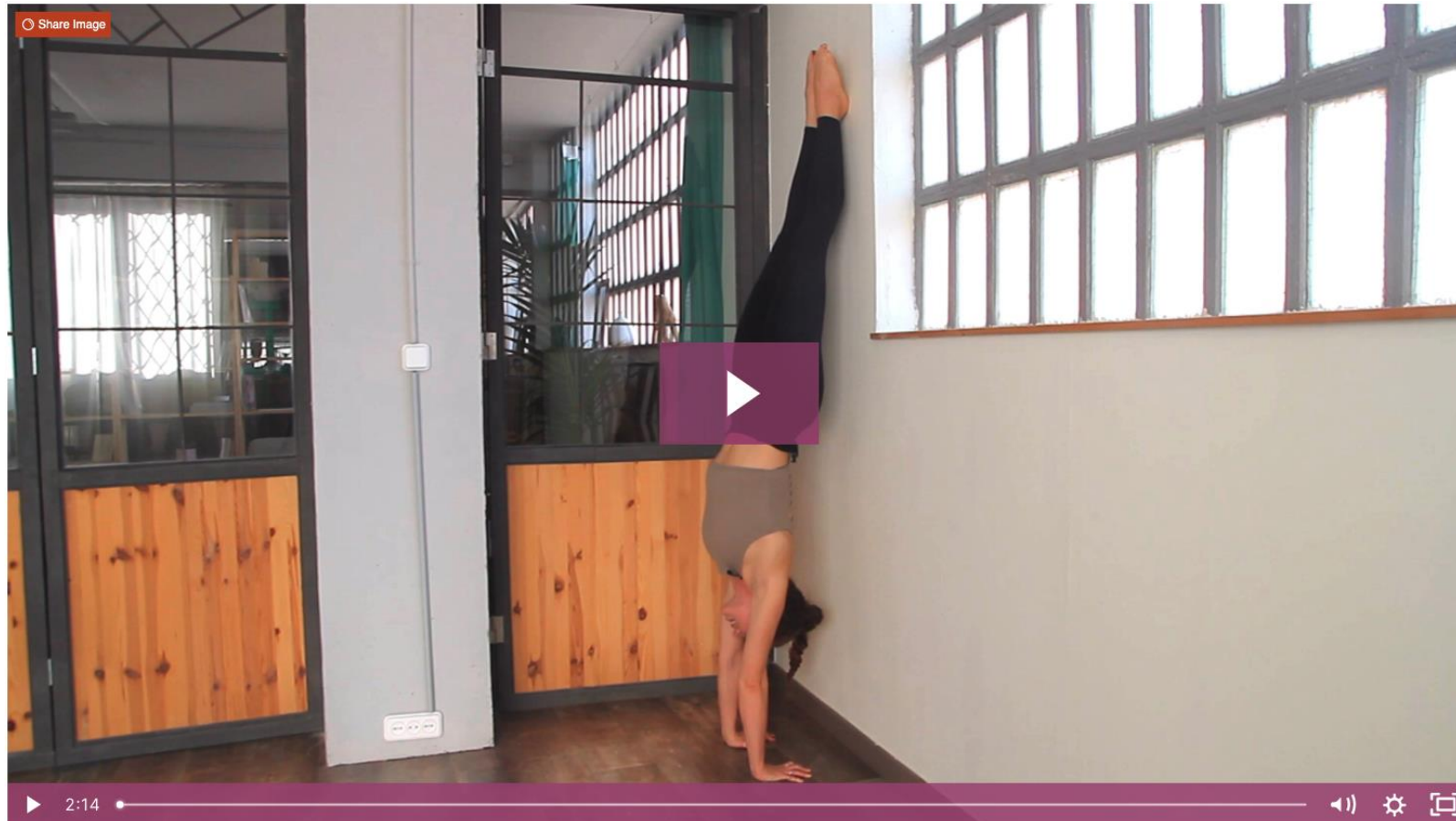
4a) Handstand Drills: Wall Kick Up

Perform 5-10 reps each leg. After finishing One Foot Away Balance, repeat for total of 3 sets.



4b) Handstand Drills: One Foot Away Balance

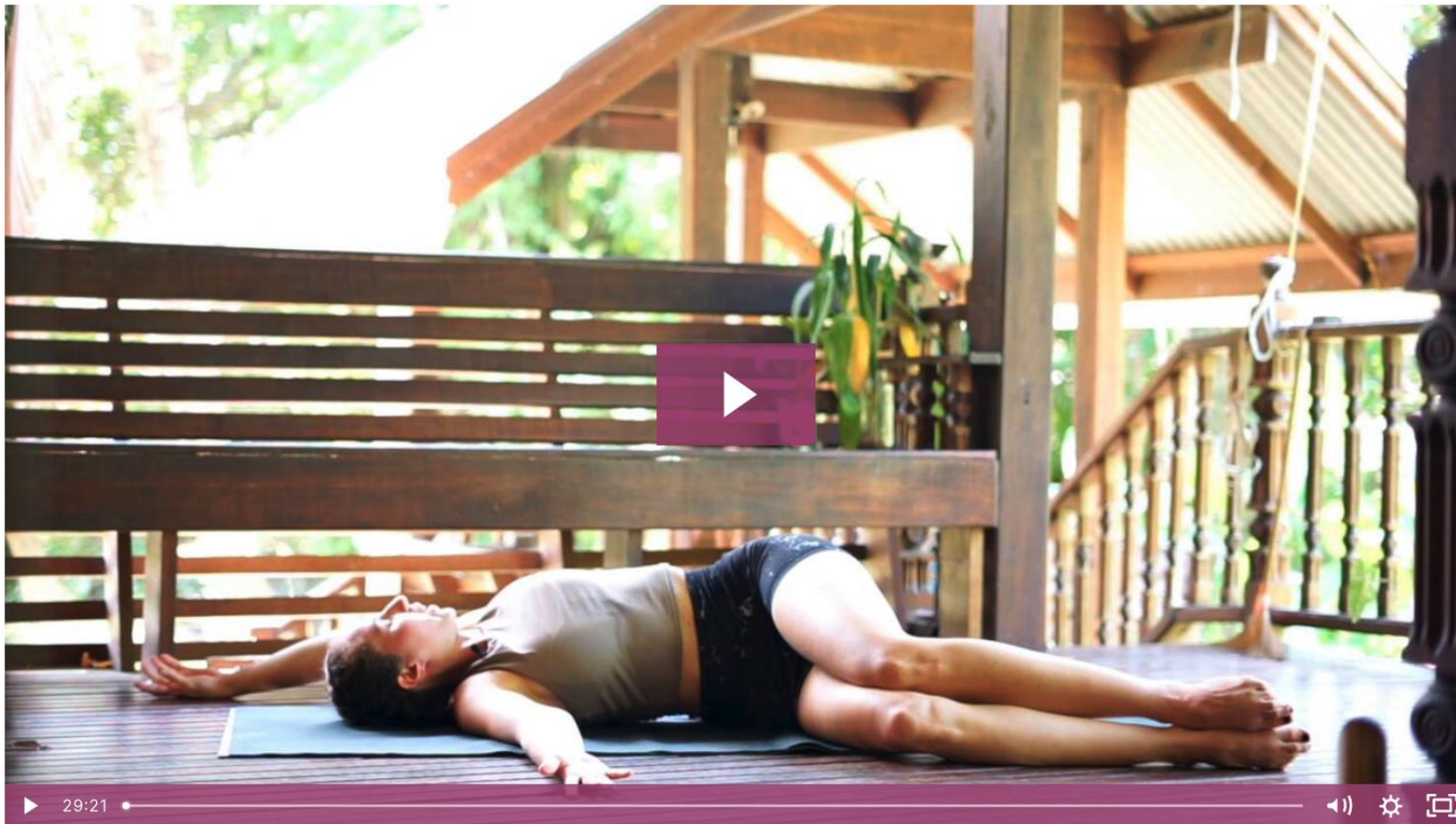
Do 10 tries total. Perform 3 sets together with the Wall Kick Up.



Week 1 / Day 2 - Mobility Work

Mobility Work

Good mobility (especially in your wrists and shoulders) and good hamstring flexibility is essential for a comfortable handstand. The better your mobility, the easier it is going to be to stack your joints on top of each other and use the least amount of force to hold the shape. Let's get to work!



Week 1 / Day 3 - Handstand Session (1B)

1) Handstand Warm-up #1

Handstand Warm-up is vital before practicing handstands. Think of it as preparation and strength training for your joints - wrists and shoulders. They are the ones to carry all the load so make sure not to skip this part.

(same video as day 1)



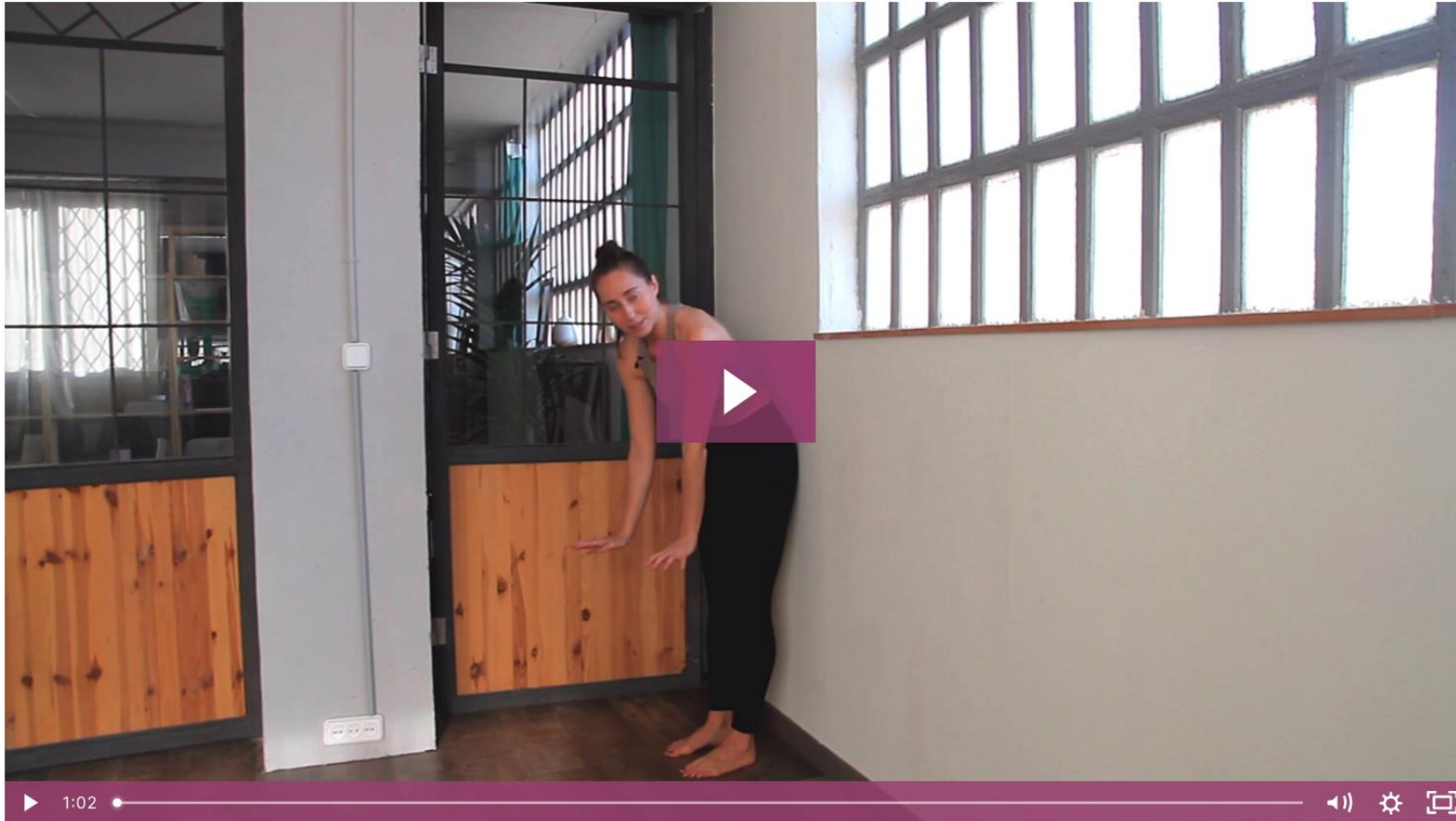
2) Strength & Movement Session #2

This quick and effective strength & movement session will activate your muscles (especially core and upper body) and prepare you for your upside down journey.



3) Handstand Conditioning: Wall Walks

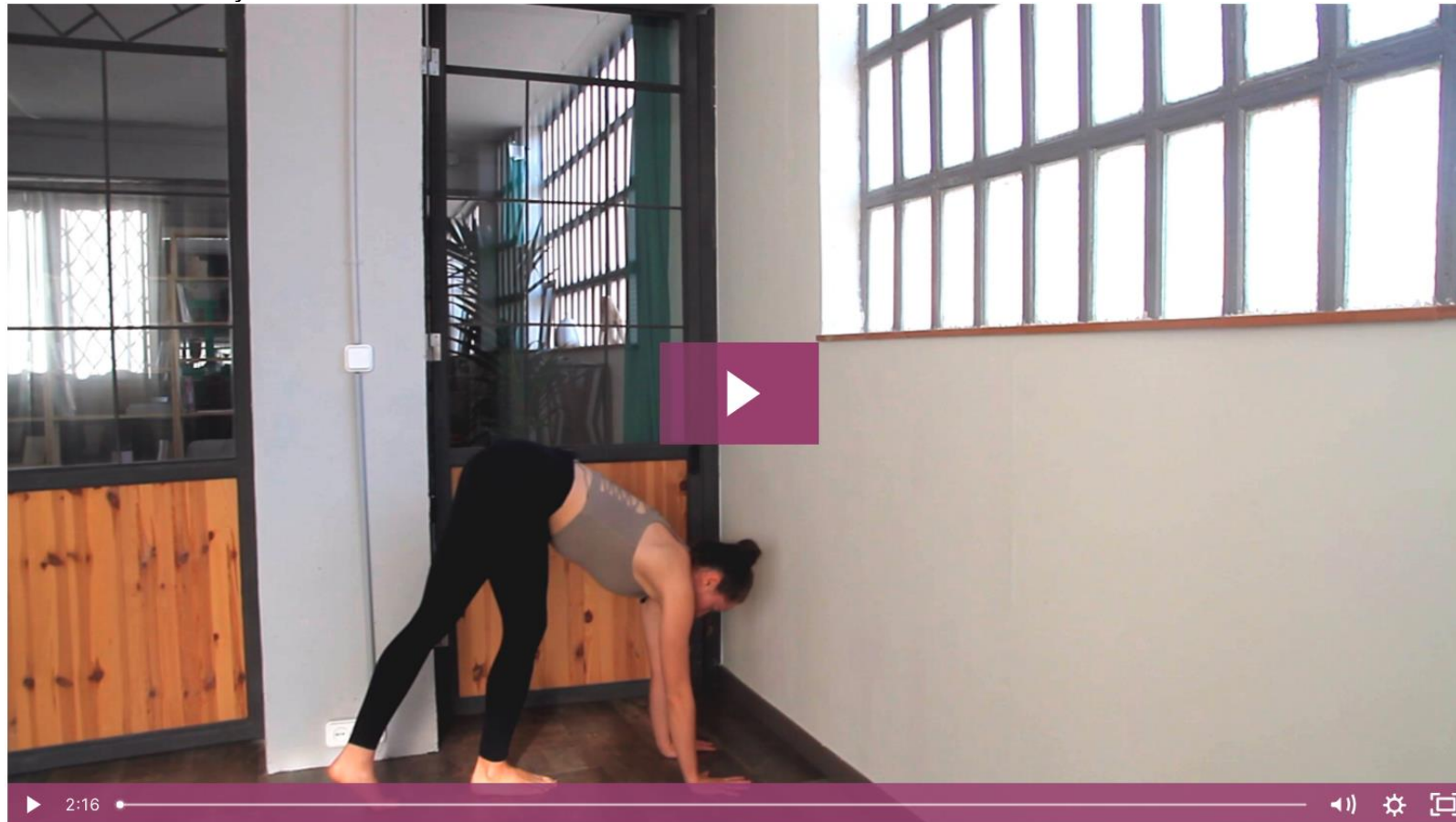
Perform 2-5x reps, then rest and repeat one more time (2 sets total).



4a) Handstand Drills: Wall Kick Ups

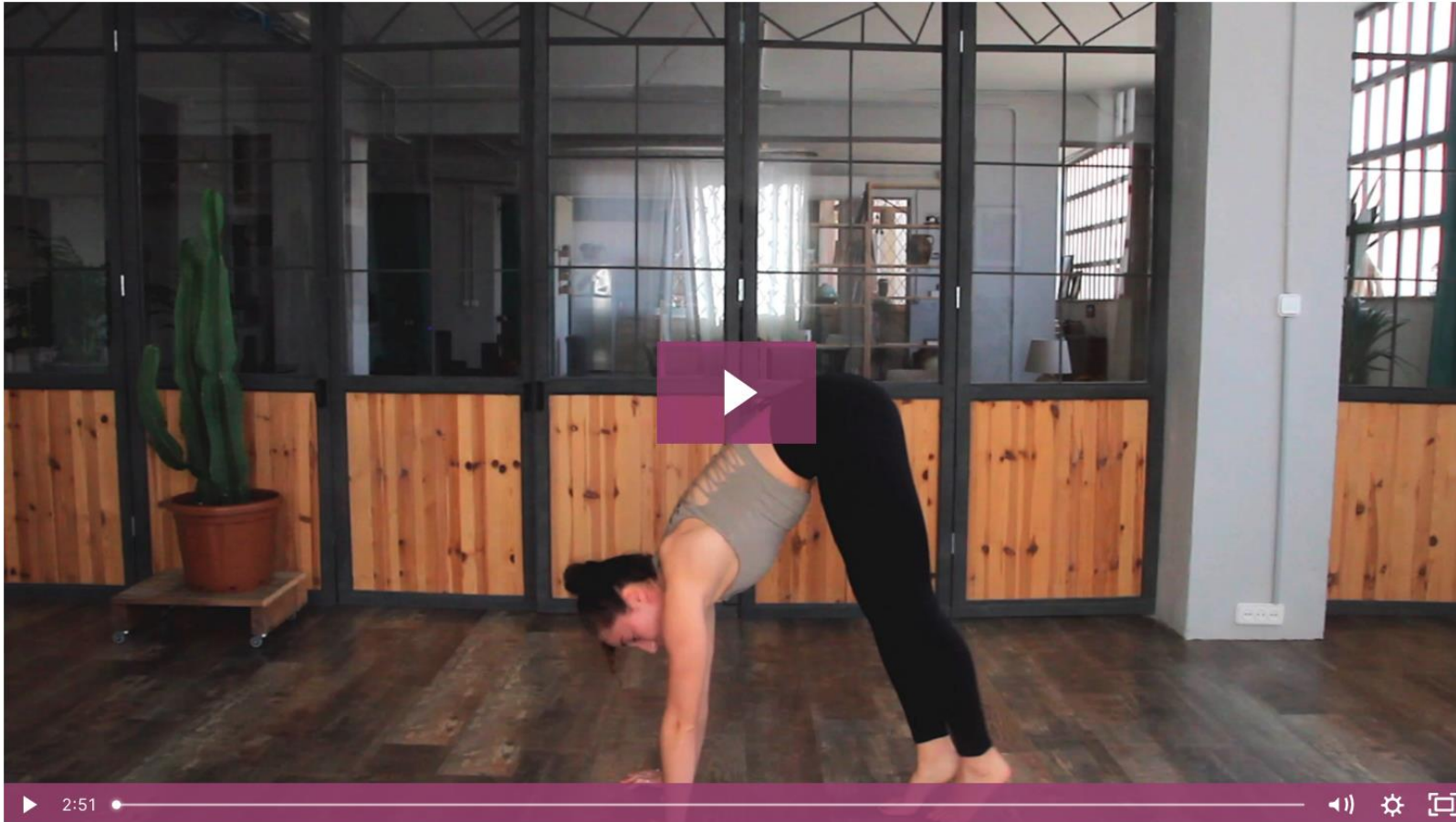
5 reps each leg. After finishing all Handstand Drills, repeat for a total of 3 sets.

(same video as day 1)



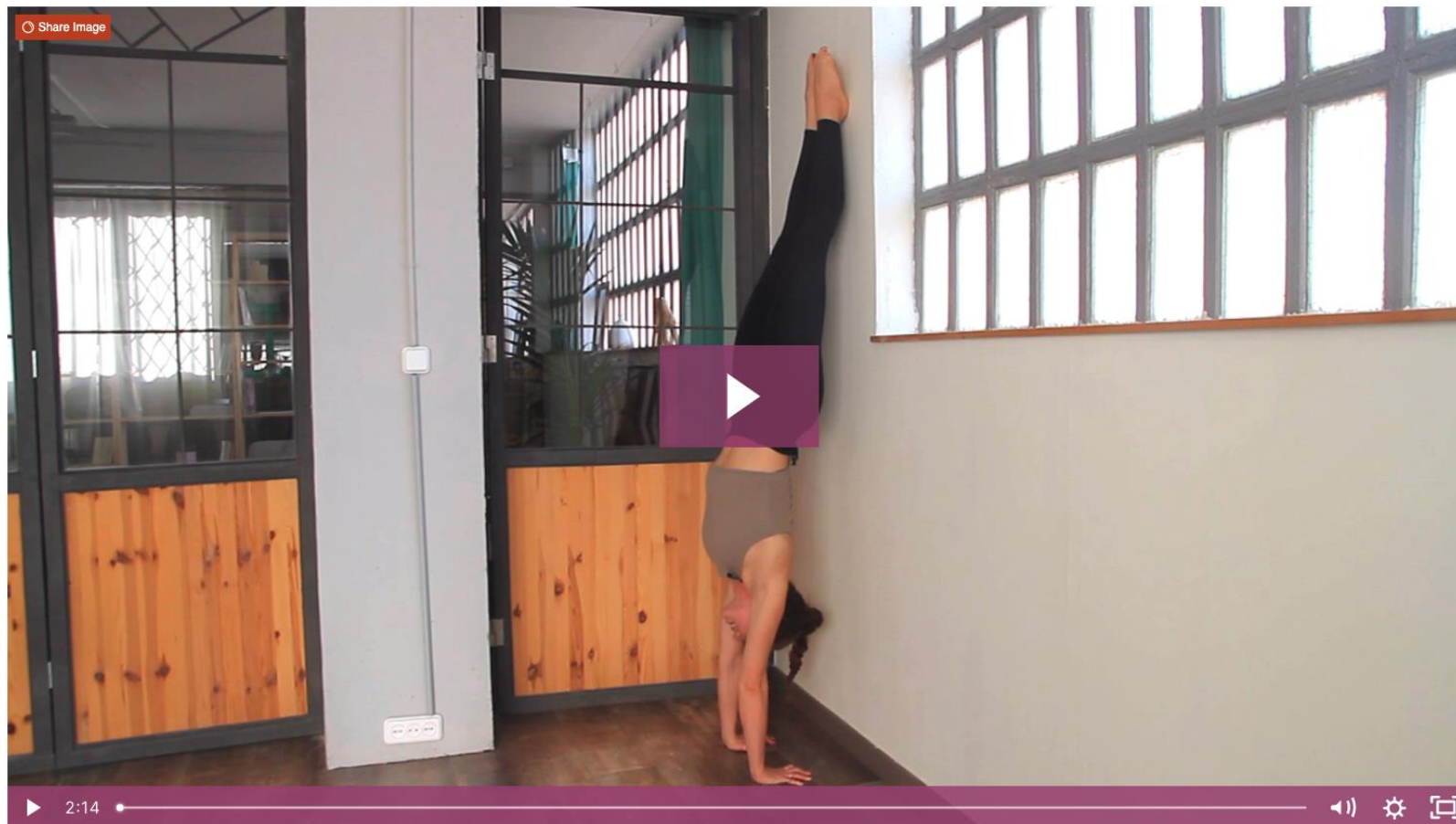
4b) Handstand Drills: Changing Legs Kick Up

10 reps total, change leading legs. Perform 3 sets total together with the other Handstand Drills.



4c) Handstand Drills: One Foot Away Balance

Do 10 tries total. Perform 3 sets in total (together with the Handstand Drills).



Week 1 / Day 4 - REST

Rest

Give your body a well deserved rest. Go outside, eat nourishing foods, play.

Week 1 / Day 5 - Handstand Session (1A)

(as per day 1)

Week 1 / Day 6 - Handstand Session (1B)

(as per day 3)

Week 1 / Day 7 - REST

Rest

Today is a day to just simply chill. Rest is as important as the exercises itself!

Week 2: Introduction & Schedule

This is what WEEK 2 is about...

In Week 2, we're still focused on strength and understanding balance (let's be real, that journey kinda never ends..), but we're putting some new drills into the mix. Get familiar with "Chest to Wall" (drill you're gonna be practicing A LOT) and some new kick up & balance techniques.

SCHEDULE

You will be alternating between Handstand Session A and B. Warm-up session is the same for the whole week, while strength & movement session and handstand drills are changing.

The schedules below are for easier orientation in the program. Also later in the game you might be able to remember the warm-ups and the drills, so videos might not be needed or you might want to take your practice to the gym. This schedule enables you to do that.

Download the schedule: Right-click on the image and click on "Save As.." (it's a simple jpg).

Week 2: Handstand Session A

WEEK 2: HANDSTAND SESSION A

1) HANDSTAND WARM UP (no. 2)

Head Up and Down	10x
Head Side to Side	10x, hold last for 5sec.
Shoulder Circles	5x each side
Hands, all directions	30sec.
Body Back, top of the hands down	30sec.
Wrist Circles	10sec.
Wrist Flexion Raises	10x
Feet Stretch	10sec.
Wrist Flexion Raises	10x
Wrist Circles	10sec.
Down Dog, changing legs	10x
Down Dog, head down	10x
Pancake Stretch	60sec.
Leg Overs	10x each leg

2) STRENGTH & MOVEMENT WORKOUT (no. 3)

Leg Raises	10x
Bodyline Hold	20sec.
Crow Hold	20sec.

Do 3 sets in total

3) HANDSTAND CONDITIONING

Chest to Wall	30sec. or until failure, 2 sets
---------------	---------------------------------

4) HANDSTAND DRILLS

Changing Legs Kick Up	10 reps total, change leading legs
One Foot Away balance	12 tries total

Do 3 sets in total (first finish both drills, then repeat)

TOTAL TIME ESTIMATE: about 45 minutes

Week 2: Handstand Session B

WEEK 2: HANDSTAND SESSION B

1) HANDSTAND WARM UP (no. 2)

Head Up and Down	10x
Head Side to Side	10x, hold last for 5sec.
Shoulder Circles	5x each side
Hands, all directions	30sec.
Body Back, top of the hands down	30sec.
Wrist Circles	10sec.
Wrist Flexion Raises	10x
Feet Stretch	10sec.
Wrist Flexion Raises	10x
Wrist Circles	10sec.
Down Dog, changing legs	10x
Down Dog, head down	10x
Pancake Stretch	60sec.
Leg Overs	10x each leg

2) STRENGTH & MOVEMENT WORKOUT (no. 4)

Hollowbody Hold	30sec.
Shoulder Tap	12x total
Tuck Jump	5x

Do 3 sets in total

3) HANDSTAND CONDITIONING

Wall Walks	3-6x (apply progressive overload), 2 sets
------------	---

4) HANDSTAND DRILLS

Knee Bent Kick Up	6x each leg (10 total)
Scissor Hold	5x each leg (10 total)

Do 3 sets in total (first finish both drills, then repeat)

TOTAL TIME ESTIMATE: about 45 minutes

Week 2 / Day 1 - Handstand Session (2A)

1) Handstand Warm-up #2

Handstand Warm-up is vital before practicing handstands. Think of it as preparation and strength training for your joints - wrists and shoulders. They are the ones to carry all the load so make sure not to skip this part.



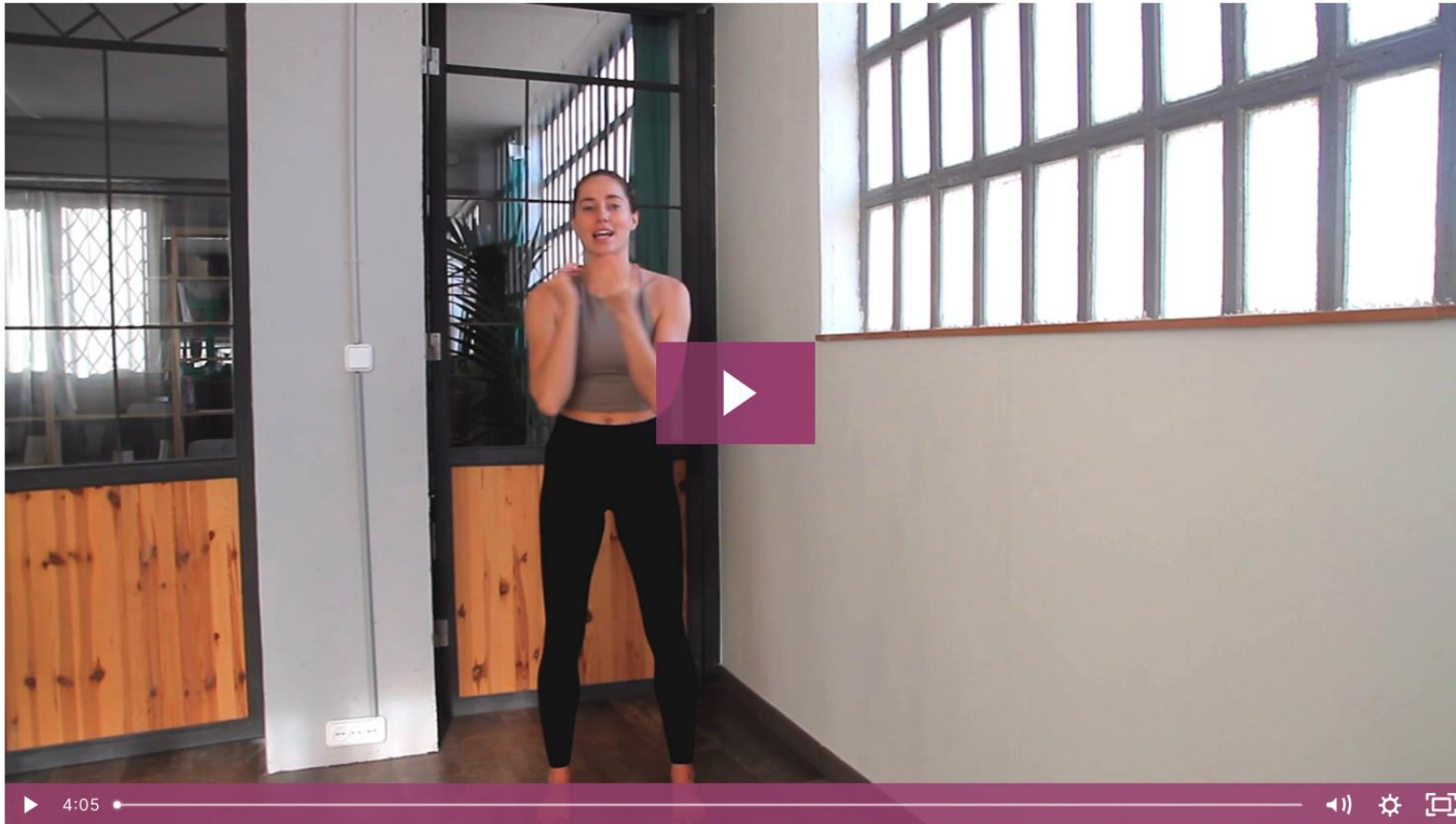
2) Strength & Movement Session #3

This quick and effective strength & movement session will activate your muscles (especially core and upper body) and prepare you for your upside down journey.



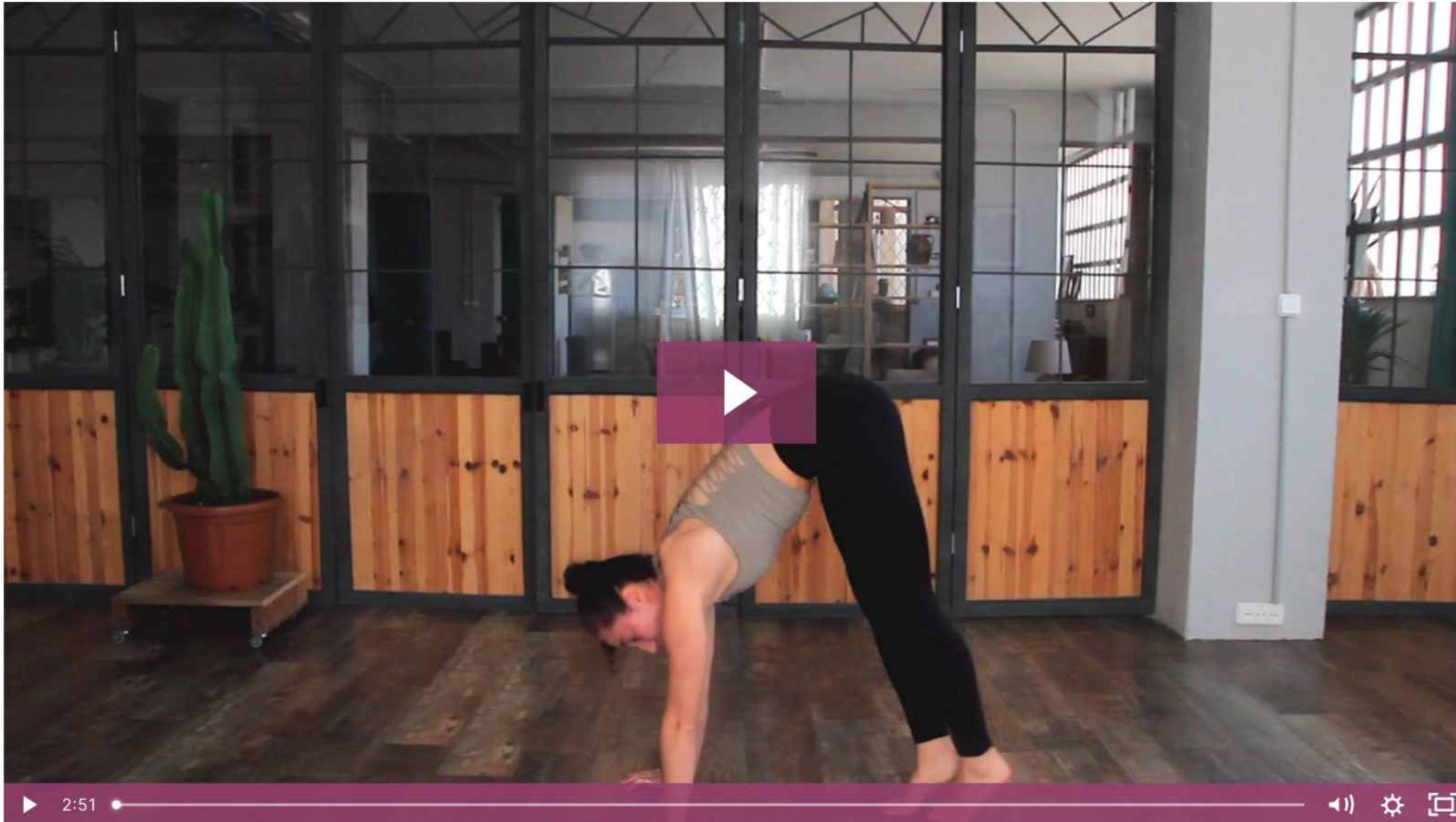
3) Handstand Conditioning: Chest to Wall Hold

30sec. or until failure, 2 sets.



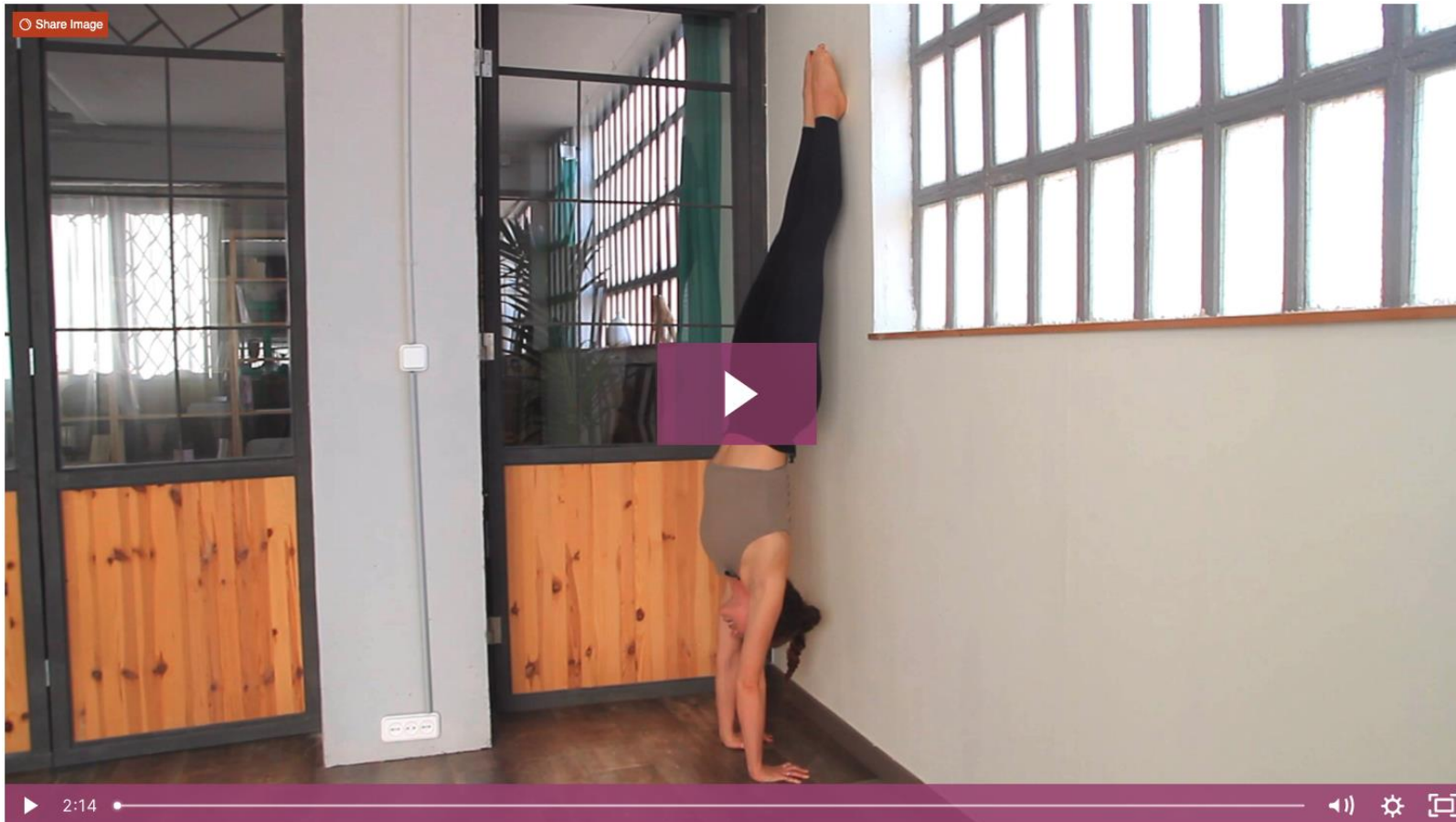
4a) Handstand Drills: Changing Legs Kick Ups

10 reps in total, change leading legs after 5 reps. After finishing the two Handstand Drills, repeat for a total of 3 sets.



4b) Handstand Drills: One Foot Away Balance

12 tries total. Together with Kick Ups, do 3 sets.



Week 2 / Day 2 - Mobility Work

Mobility Work

Good mobility (especially in your wrists and shoulders) and good hamstring flexibility is essential for a comfortable handstand. The better your mobility, the easier it is going to be to stack your joints on top of each other and use the least amount of force to hold the shape. Let's get to work!



Week 2 / Day 3 - Handstand Session (2B)

1) Handstand Warm-up #2

Handstand Warm-up is vital before practicing handstands. Think of it as preparation and strength training for your joints - wrists and shoulders. They are the ones to carry all the load so make sure not to skip this part.



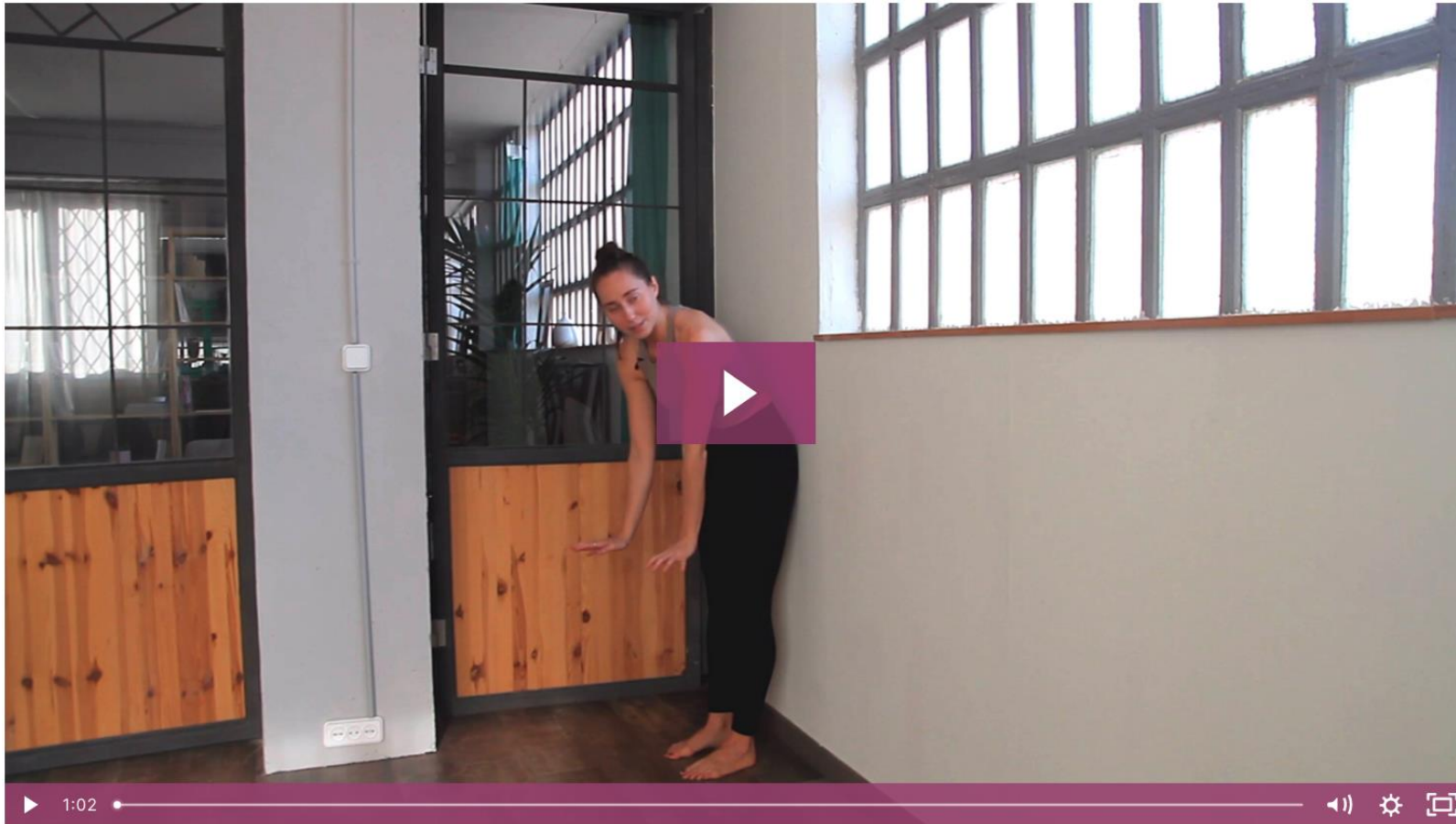
2) Strength & Movement Session #4

This quick and effective strength & movement session will activate your muscles (especially core and upper body) and prepare you for your upside down journey.



3) Handstand Conditioning: Wall Walks

Do 3-6x reps (apply progressive overload) for a total of 2 sets. Res in between sets.



4a) Handstand Drills: Knee Bent Kick Up

6 reps each leg for a total of 12. Together with Scissor Hold, do 3 sets.



4b) Handstand Drills: Scissor Hold

Do 5 reps for each leg, 10 in total. 1 rep means going from the ground up and trying to find your balance for a few seconds. Feel free to count the seconds and note them down for reference.



Week 2 / Day 4 - REST

Rest

Give your body a well deserved rest. Go outside, eat nourishing foods, play.

Week 2 / Day 5 - Handstand Session (2A)

(as per day 1)

Week 2 / Day 6 - Handstand Session (2B)

(as per day 3)

Week 2 / Day 7 - REST

Rest

Give your body a well deserved rest. Go outside, eat nourishing foods, play.

