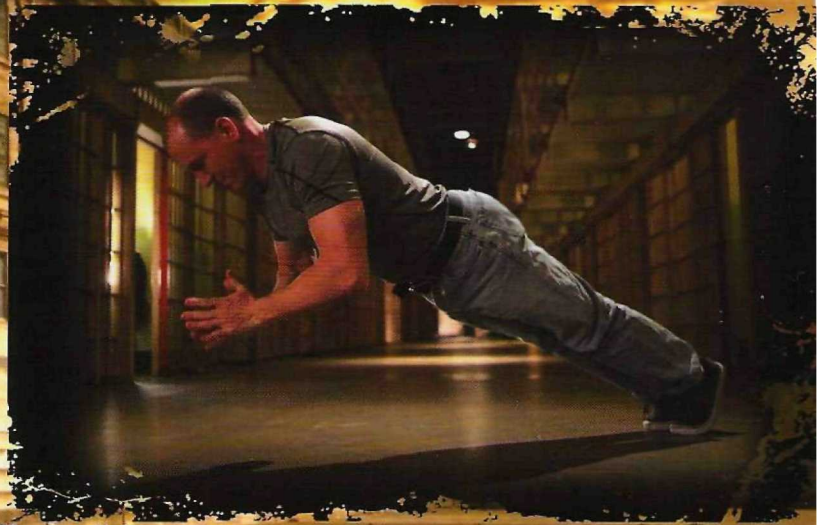


CONVICT CONDITIONING

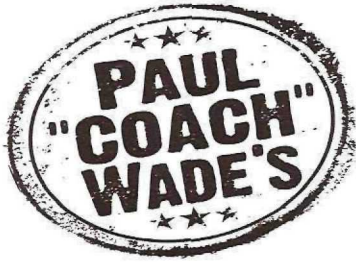
VOLUME I:

THE PRISON PUSHUP SERIES

WITH BRETT JONES
AND MAX SHANK



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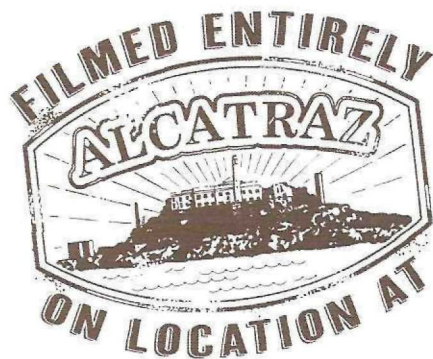


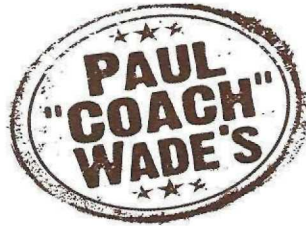
CONVICT CONDITIONING

VOLUME I:

THE PRISON PUSHUP SERIES

WITH **BRETT JONES**
AND **MAX SHANK**





CONVICT CONDITIONING

VOLUME I: THE PRISON PUSHUP SERIES

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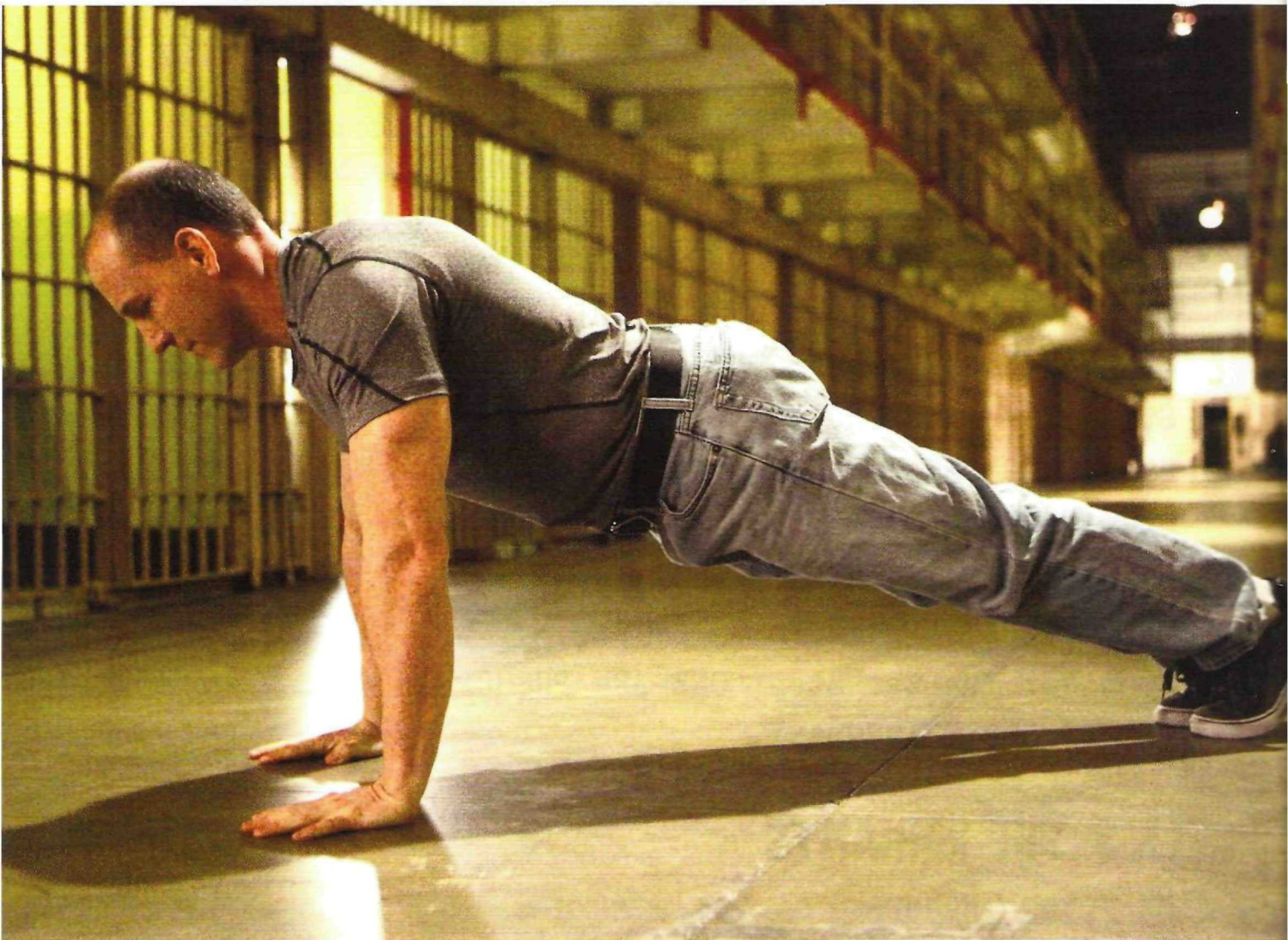
Fitness and strength are meaningless qualities without *health*. With correct training, these three benefits should naturally proceed hand-in-hand. In this book, every effort has been made to convey the importance of safe training technique, but despite this all individual trainees are different and needs will vary. Proceed with caution, and at your own risk. Your body is your own responsibility-look after it. All medical experts agree that you should consult your physician before initiating a training program. Be safe!

Despite this, the author maintains that all the exercise principles within this volume-techniques, methods and ideology-are valid. Use them, and become the best.



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CELL 1

PUSHUP
THEORY





elcome to the first DVD in the *Convict Conditioning* series.

These DVDs are based on the bodyweight strength system first presented in the Dragon Door book *Convict Conditioning*, written by Paul Wade. The Convict Conditioning system represents the most powerful, efficient distillation of the best hardcore prison bodyweight training methods ever to exist.

Many of these older, very potent solitary training systems are on the verge of dying out behind bars, as American prisoners begin to gain access to weights gyms, and modern “bodybuilding thinking” floods into the prisons. That’s why we chose to shoot these groundbreaking DVDs in Alcatraz. Back in the day, The Rock was the biggest, baddest jailhouse there was. It seemed like the right place to show you the most powerful prison training techniques there are.

In this system, no matter what kind of movement we’re working on, we focus on a chain of ten progressive exercises. When you master one exercise, you move on to the next, and so on. Because the later exercises build on the earlier ones, they are sometimes called the “ten steps”. When you reach the tenth exercise, you will be just about as strong as it’s possible for a human being to be in that movement. For this reason, the tenth exercise in any chain is called the “Master Step”. How this all works will be crystal clear if you’ve picked up a copy of the *Convict Conditioning* bodyweight book. This DVD is pretty self-explanatory as it goes along. For right now though, don’t worry about getting too tied up in terminology and numbers. This first DVD we’ll focus on the classic bodyweight movement for upper body pressing power—the pushup.

Benefits of pushups.

We’ll start first with the pushups. Pushups are a critical part of any prison training routine. When you do a push up, you are doing the best exercise there is for building strength and size in the pectorals—one of the real “workhorse” muscle groups of the torso. The anterior deltoid, a major shoulder muscle, is connected to the pectoral and gets a hell of a workout from pushups as it transmits the force from the chest to the arms. Pushups also build big, strong triceps along the back of the arms. If you want big arms, you need to work your triceps, because it’s the biggest muscle of the arm—at least a third bigger than the biceps. As well as these muscles, lots of other muscles have to work hard isometrically to lock you into position as you do your pushups. These muscles include the lats, the abs, the hips and the legs. Pushups also build functional strength. The muscles you use for throwing, pushing, and striking are pretty much the exact same muscles you are building when you work hard on your pushups. Unless you have great pushing strength in the torso, shoulders, triceps and elbows, you can’t be considered “strong”.

The pushup series.

Most athletes fail to become monstrously strong at pushup movements, because they only know two or three types of pushup; maybe classic pushups, kneeling pushups, and pushups with the feet up on something. Just having three exercises in your toolbox isn't enough to allow you to maximize your potential. So we'll be showing you ten different types of pushup, all given in order of difficulty. In fact, many of these steps contain further "hidden steps" within them, meaning they can be modified in ways we'll demonstrate, so there are many more than ten exercises here. There are enough to keep you getting stronger for a lifetime. We'll begin with the easiest pushup movement, something almost anyone can do, and we'll show you how to build to the one-arm prison-style pushup—the hardest type of pure horizontal pushup movement that exists. At the end of the series, we'll show you a little recap of these ten steps, to help you assimilate what you've learned. Then, in the following section, we'll show you some extra powerful pushup variations you can use in your workouts at home. Once we're done, you'll know as much about the science of pushups as any hardcore prison athlete, and you'll know way more than the average personal trainer could even dream about!

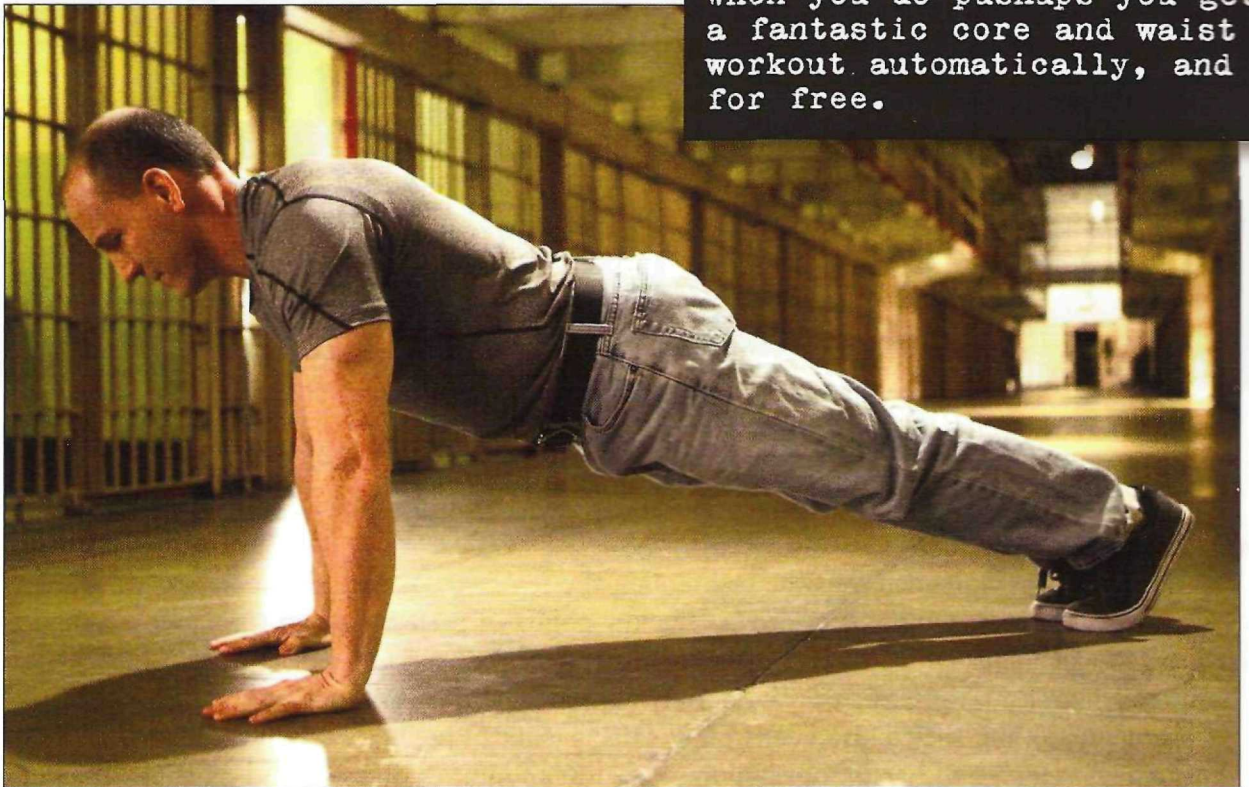


THE TEN PUSHUP COMMANDMENTS

Before we launch into the techniques, the ten steps of the pushup series, we want to take a few minutes to discuss the key points of perfect pushup form. We're going to give you ten of these points. The aspects of proper form we are about to show you apply to all your pushups, and they'll not only unlock the muscle and power-building potential of each rep you do, but they'll also keep you as safe as you can be. Bodyweight training is all about improving strength and health, not building up a list of injuries or aches and pains. So these are important, and apply to every set of every exercise and every step you do. They are so fundamental, we'll call them the Ten Commandments of good pushup form.

COMMANDMENT I: BODY ALIGNMENT!

Let's start with the basics. We'll take a look at some of the elements of form you should be looking out for when you do your own pushups.



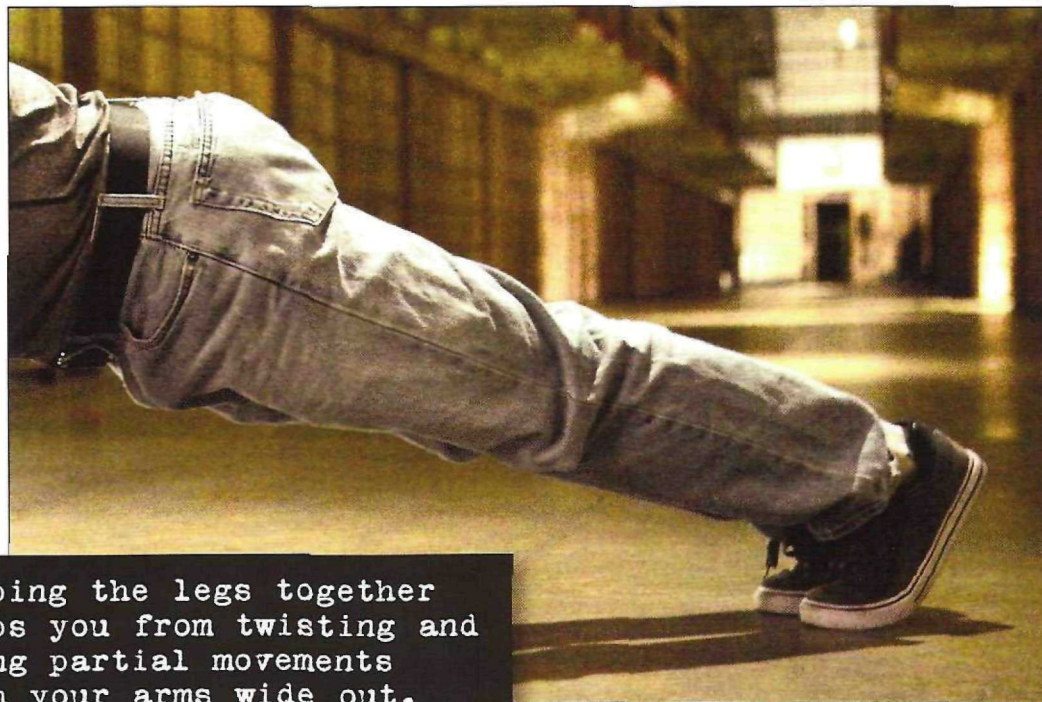
When you do pushups you get a fantastic core and waist workout automatically, and for free.

One of the most important elements of a good pushup is that the body should be aligned; legs, waist and shoulders should form a straight line. Often when you see guys doing pushups, their hips sag, or their butt moves up and down during the exercise. This is bad form, and it's entirely due to weak waist muscles, which lack the strength to lock the body into place. Allowing your body to sag places your lower back at risk; it also encourages relaxed abs, and relaxing your abs will make your midsection weaker, not stronger. You should *start* your pushups with your torso and legs aligned, and they should *stay* aligned throughout the set, until you complete your final rep. If you work through the step I'll show you, your core muscles will have gradually strengthened as much as they need to, possibly without your realizing it. Bodyweight work is efficient,

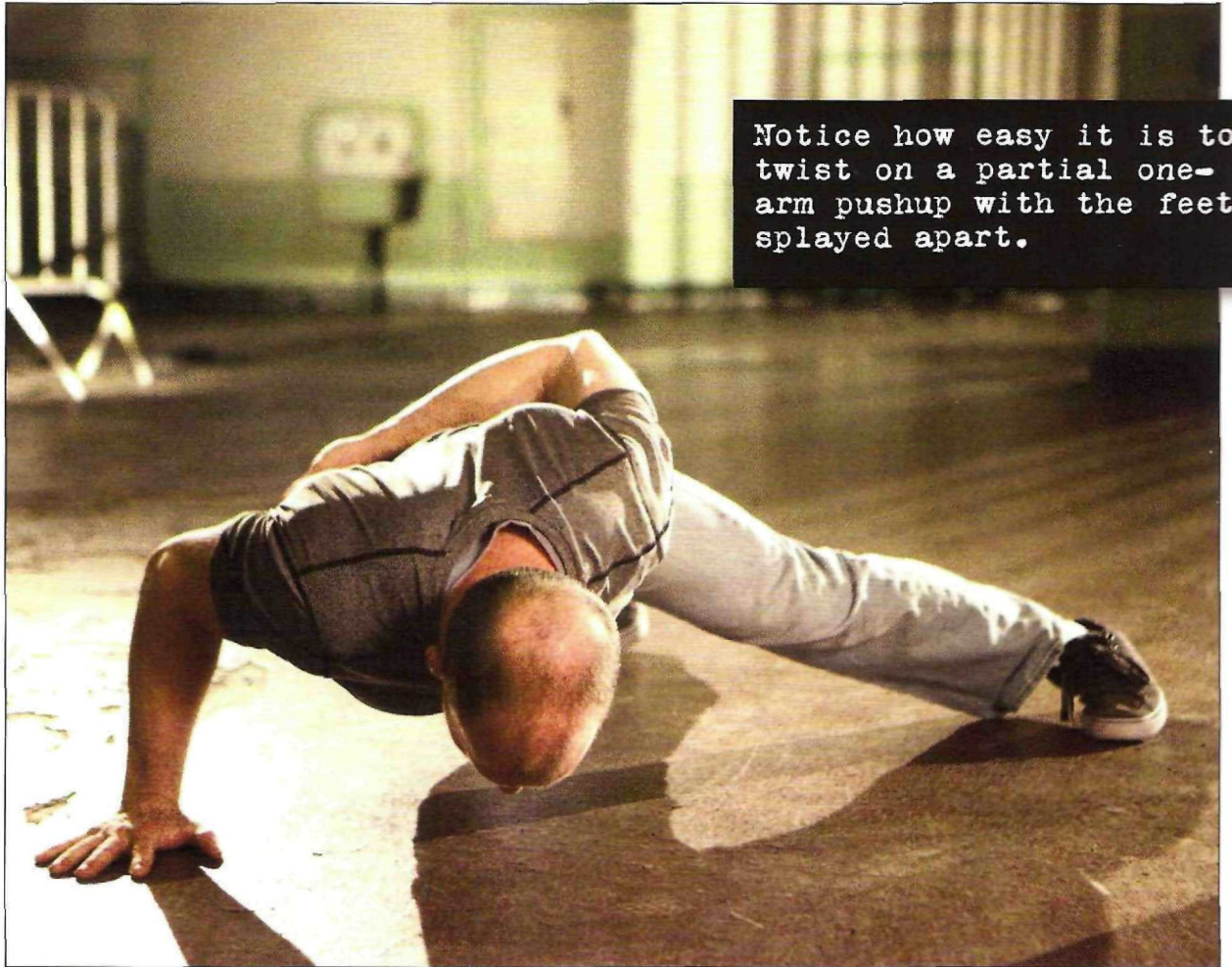
because it tends to work the entire muscular system as an integrated unit, as nature intended. Pushups are no exception. When you do pushups you get a fantastic core and waist workout automatically, and for free. If you're wasting your time with one of those useless little electrical stimulation belt gizmos, throw it in the trash and get to work on pushups instead. Keeping aligned works not only the core, but the legs and the deep muscles of the trunk. So set yourself in concrete! Another tip that tends to facilitate good spinal and hip positioning during pushups is to look straight ahead of yourself, or slightly up. But this isn't absolutely necessary.

COMMANDMENT 2: FEET TOGETHER!

Take a look at the lower body posture. You'll notice that the feet and legs are together. This is crucial. You might think "what's the big deal about the legs being together?", and, indeed, it's pretty easy to keep the legs close when you do two-arm pushups. But when you do one-arm variations, keeping the legs together is incredibly hard. It stops you from twisting and using partial movements with your arms wide out.



Keeping the legs together stops you from twisting and using partial movements with your arms wide out.

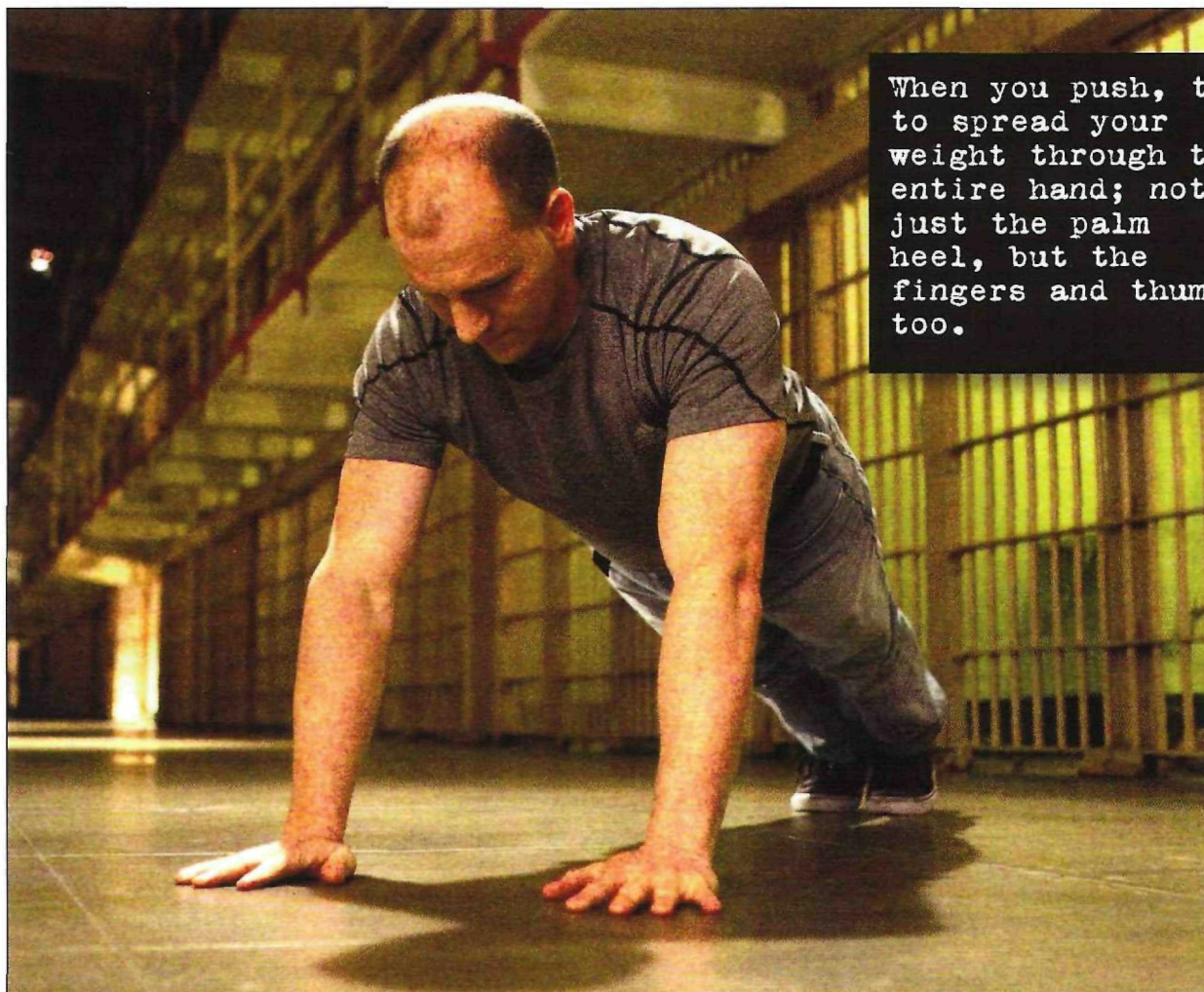


Notice how easy it is to twist on a partial one-arm pushup with the feet splayed apart.

With the feet close, you can't twist—or you fall over. For this reason, keeping the legs together is a fundamental habit to pick up and stick to early on. It's why all prison pushups focus on having the legs very close. When you do your pushups, even from day one, keep your legs together.

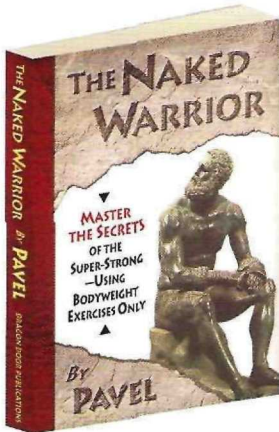
COMMANDMENT 3: USE YOUR PALMS!

We've looked at the legs, now let's consider the hands. As to hand placement, some guys like to do their pushups on their knuckles, like a boxer. This really isn't necessary, but is acceptable if you have a wrist injury and doing pushups off your palms is painful. Some people also do strange things like pushups off the back of their wrists. Avoid anything like this. Palms down is the classical way to do pushups. It's how soldiers and sportsmen have done pushups for thousands of years, and it's still the best way. Also avoid those pushup handles you can buy. Guys who regularly do bench presses and military presses with bars are inevitably plagued by elbow and forearm injuries.



When you push, try to spread your weight through the entire hand; not just the palm heel, but the fingers and thumb too.

This is due to the pressing action *while* gripping. Pressing off a flat palm is far more natural, and allows forces to be distributed through the forearm in a much healthier way. Men who rely on pushup movements have far fewer wrist and shoulder injuries than weight-training athletes for this very reason. In many cases, bodybuilders and lifters with chronic tennis or golfer's elbow or carpal tunnel have switched to pushups and found pain relief quite quickly. When you push, try to spread your weight through the entire hand; not just the palm heel, but the fingers and thumb too.



This will strengthen the tendons of your hands; strong hands and fingers are a crucial element of functional strength. The issue of fingertip pushups or pushups off your thumbs is beyond the scope of this DVD. But if you really want to excel at these things, you should experiment with the ten steps, but using your fingers. Start with wall pushups using your fingers, and so on. If you get to the one-arm pushup using only your fingers, you'll have fingers like titanium rods. For more advice on fingertip pushup form, check out Pavel Tsatsouline's *The Naked Warrior* bodyweight training manual, also available from Dragon Door.



COMMANDMENT 4: “SOFT” ARMS!

You'll see that at the top of the pushup, the arms are straight; we often talk about “locking” the arms at the top of a pushup, but this is not quite right. You should avoid fully locking your elbows at the top, to steer clear of hyperextending the joint, or irritating delicate soft tissues in between the joints such as bursae. Instead of fully locking at the top of a pushup, just keep your elbows a *little* way off fully extended under weight. This may only be a fraction of an inch, but once you have some experience with pushups you'll understand what I mean.

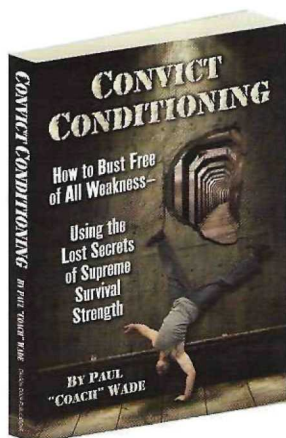
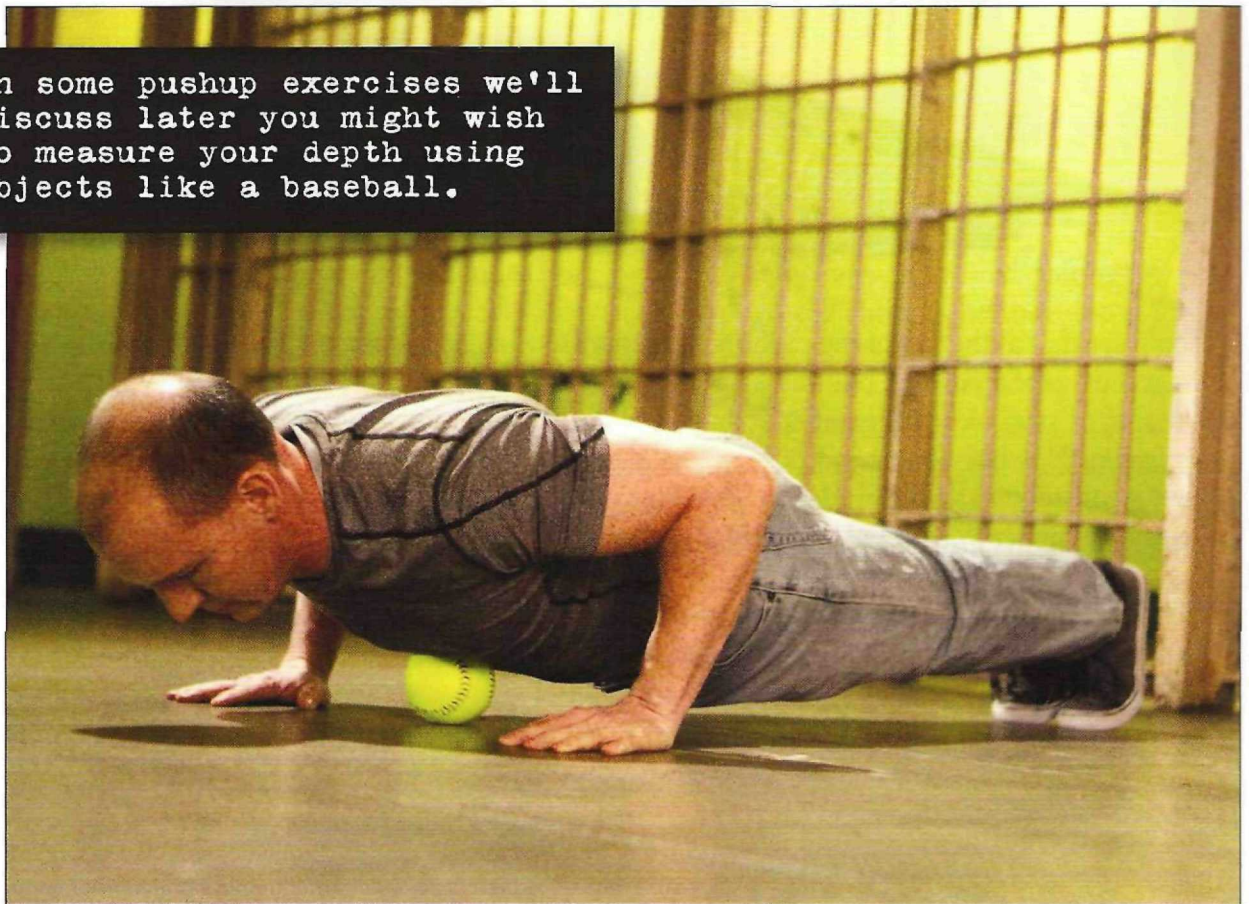
Not fully extending the elbows is sometimes called keeping your arms “soft”. This subtle difference may not even be discernible to the casual observer. But it's a definite skill you should seek to cultivate throughout all your pushup training, no matter what particular step you are working with.

COMMANDMENT 5: KISS-THE-BABY!

Okay, we've examined the top position. Now let's take a look at the bottom position of a pushup. When you get to the bottom of a pushup, no matter what step you are on, never just allow your bodyweight to *crash* to the ground. Always support your bodyweight at the *bottom*, no matter what kind of depth you're working with. Because the muscles are under tension in this position, it's good to pause at the bottom of pushup movements. If you are using pauses, it's much more productive to pause at the bottom, while the muscles are under tension, than at the top, where your arms are nearly straight and the leverage makes things easy. Of course, this is easier said than done, and if you are working near your limit, you might need that breather at the top! If you need it to keep on going, take it.

In some pushup exercises we'll discuss later you might wish to measure your depth using objects like a baseball or a basketball underneath your torso, like this.

In some pushup exercises we'll discuss later you might wish to measure your depth using objects like a baseball.



If you use a ball, remember it's just a tool to determine the correct depth for full pushups. That's all. It's not a *platform*. Don't collapse onto it, or bounce off it. You still need to fully control your bodyweight in the bottom position if you want to build muscle. The *Convict Conditioning* book describes the "kiss-the-baby" technique. Only touch the baseball onto your chest with as much pressure as you would use to kiss a newborn baby on the forehead. Just touch it. Any more pressure and you've lost control.

COMMANDMENT 6: TIGHT ELBOWS!

Okay, that's some thoughts on the static elements of form; the posture and top and bottom points. Now let's take a look at some motive, moving, points. When observers look at pushups, they tend to look at hand position, depth, or speed. But there is actually more fundamental stuff going on that we miss.

When you press, the elbows should be pretty tight, quite close to his lats. This is the strongest position for all pressing, whether it's bodyweight pushups or bench presses. It's the strongest position because it's the most authentic, most natural angle for the path of your arms. Keeping your elbows pretty tight allows your lats to fire isometrically during pushups, so they can act as stabilizers to the movement. Many people think pushups only work the chest muscles in the torso, but, when performed like this, they also give the lats a hell of a workout. If you brace yourself properly during pushups, you'll feel your lats powerfully firing. This is the best way to do your pushups.

COMMANDMENT 7: AVOID WIDE HAND SPACINGS!

These days, you increasingly see guys doing pushups with wide hand spacing; way beyond the line of the shoulders. This is done in a misguided attempt to keep the elbows forced out. The trend to keep your elbows wide during pushups is really a bodybuilding thing, intended to artificially isolate the pectorals. Using a wide hand position to work the pecs is another mistake. Your pecs are very strong; they are already the strong link in the pushup movement. Your strength in pressing isn't limited by your chest, but by your shoulders and triceps. Trying to artificially shift more emphasis onto your pecs will only increase this differential. It can de-condition your overall pressing strength and also irritates your joints. You should never press anything, whether your bodyweight or a bar, with the hands and elbows deliberately splayed out. It's misguided. Avoid weird angles. You don't need to do pushups with your hands wide, and whenever you press allow your arms to move as nature intended.

COMMANDMENT 8: USE POWER BREATHING!

The phrase “power breathing” means a lot of different things to different people. Let’s keep it simple. In bodyweight terms, *power breathing* means synchronizing your breathing with your body movement to maximize your strength and stamina output. Generally speaking, this means inhaling as you perform the negative phase of a movement, and exhaling as you perform the positive. Breathe in on the way down, breathe out on the way up. Taking in air before you put out effort helps you gather psychological impetus. Exhaling as you put out effort helps you to focus, and increases your strength. As far as pushups and pressing goes, having a chest full of air before you push sets your rib cage and clavicles, and acts like a pneumatic cushion, giving you up to ten percent more pushing power. Remember this during those last, struggling reps of a set of pushups! Air is your friend.

If you need to take extra breaths, just do it. Some guys hiss, some grunt, some don’t. It doesn’t really matter. Find out what works for you. Don’t get too hung up on strange breathing habits or techniques. If a way of breathing seems wrong, it probably is.

COMMANDMENT 9: MINIMIZE MOMENTUM!

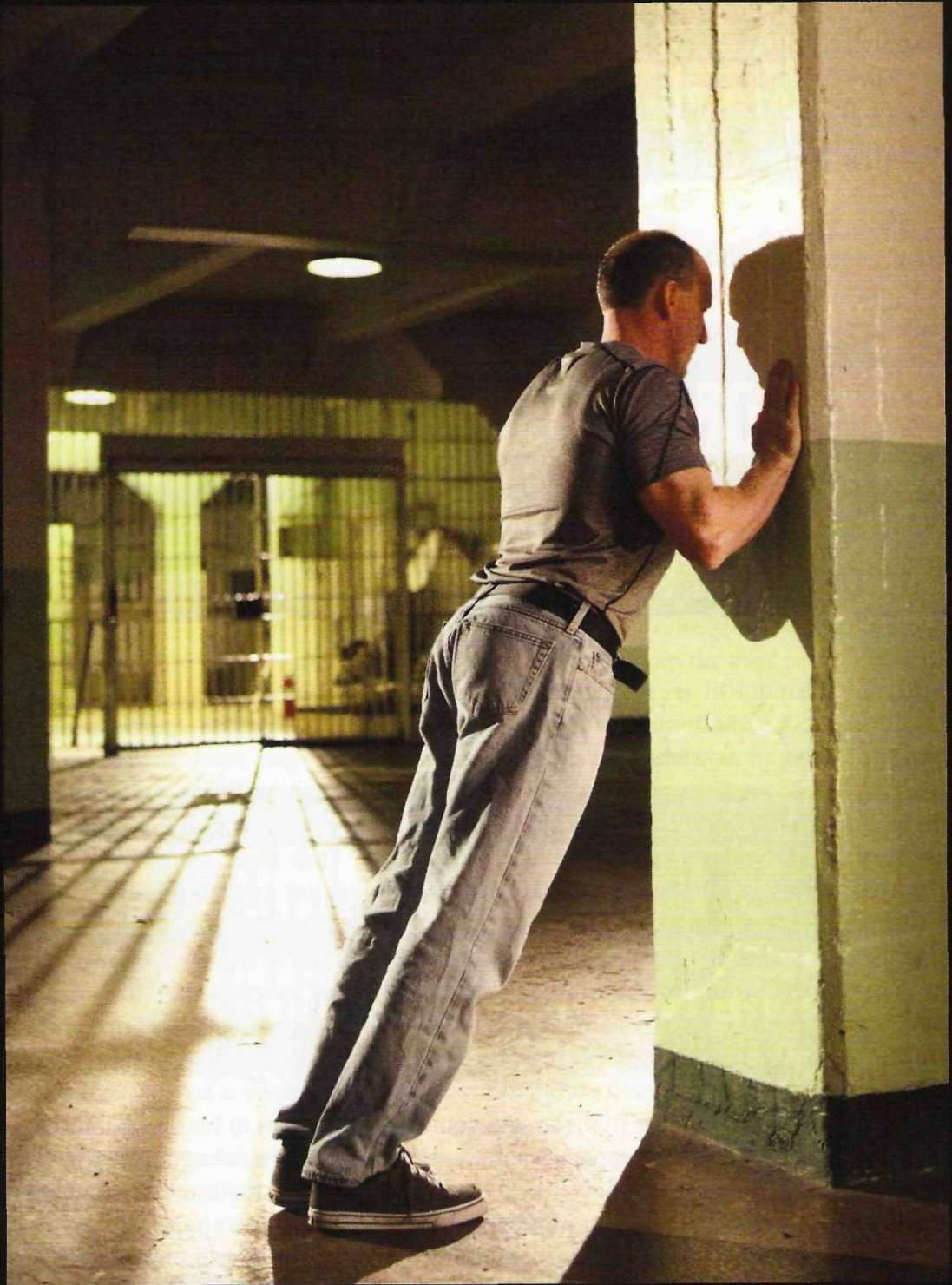
Whenever you do pushups, try to avoid *momentum*. If momentum is doing the work it means your muscles aren’t. Smooth, slower reps will help you eliminate momentum from your exercises. Two seconds down and two up with a pause at the bottom is a great rule of thumb. It strengthens the joints, increases intensity and really turns up the heat on your muscles.

We advise everyone to try to keep this kind of smooth, slow pace for at least the first three steps of each series; if you’ve got the stones, try to keep the smooth movements for steps four through six, also. But reality check; the harder your exercises become, the less easy this kind of focused

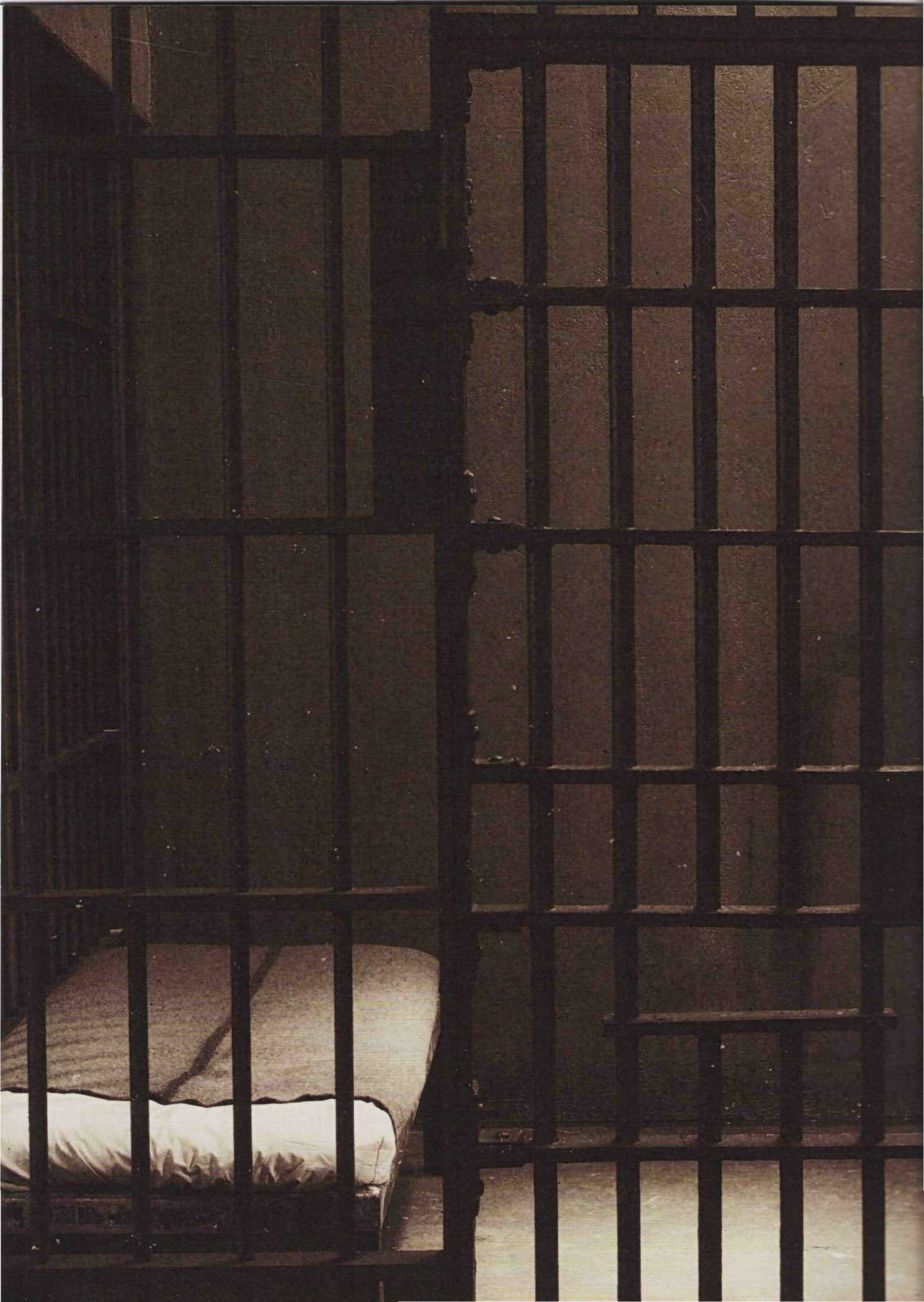
pace is. You'll find a little more aggression, speed and thrust creeping into your exercises. Nobody ever did a one-arm handstand pushup in super slow-motion! So easing up and going a little faster as you progress is not always a bad thing. Just be prudent and apply body wisdom. If you are strong enough to use smooth reps, do so. At some point in your training, you might want to add explosive movements, like plyometric, clapping pushups. That's fine for training variety and a nice change of pace. But make sure the bulk of your strength is built using great control. Control is a key principle in all bodyweight arts, whether it's prison calisthenics or traditional gymnastics. Strength is your base, and it should be synonymous with control in your mind. Strength is *control*!

COMMANDMENT 10: APPLY "SYMMETRICAL CAPPING"!

This final Commandment is not a matter of technical execution; it relates to your training approach. In Convict Conditioning, athletes tend to work from *bilateral exercises*, moving the body with two limbs, to *asymmetrical exercises* where one-limb gets more work than the other. When the trainee becomes very strong, they ultimately start training using *unilateral exercises*, where they lift the entire body using only one limb. A lot of athletes tend to favor their strongest side when they use unsymmetrical or unilateral movements. Their instincts tell them to do more work with their stronger arm, because that's just easier. If you ask guys to do one-arm pushups, most of them will immediately try with their right hand—because it's strongest. They set their P.R.s using the right hand. It's an ego thing. Avoid this temptation! If you give in to working your strongest side hardest, you'll increase any strength disparities inherent in your system. Your strongest arm will get much stronger, and your weaker side won't be able to keep up. This is a bad thing. Remember that a system, whether a chain, a complex piece of engineering or the human muscular system, is only as strong as its weakest link. Fortunately, there is an easy technique called "symmetrical capping" you can use to make sure your strength begins to become balanced. On all uneven or unilateral exercises, *always start your workout with your weakest arm*. Note the number of reps you do with that arm. Then, when you switch to doing the same exercise with your stronger arm, perform the same amount of reps, *but no more*. Never do any more reps with your strongest arm than you can with your weakest. Resist the temptation to do more work on your strongest side. If you train this way, eventually, your weakest side will begin to catch up, and you'll iron out any strength imbalances. Symmetrical capping is a great approach you can use for pretty much any exercise to work through any weak areas in your body.



**CELL 2:
THE
PUSHUP**



T

here's ten great points for you to be going on with. You should be looking to apply these points on every single step, every rep of every set of every pushup you do. There's no excuses now; this is a DVD, not a gym class. You can return to the theory segment and watch it over every time you try something new. It's said that "practice makes perfect", but that's not really true. It's more accurate to say that; "*perfect practice makes perfect*". This is why, in Convict Conditioning, an athlete is encouraged to work with easier exercises, for high volume, early on, rather than launching into the heaviest and hardest exercises as soon as possible. It's easier to get your form perfect with lighter exercises. Once these patterns are ingrained into your nervous system through lots of hard work on the early steps, the Ten Commandments will be automatic; they'll be reflex, a part of your normal movement patterns. You won't have to think about them, and many of the biomechanical rules and postural nuances which you've learned will carry over to different movement patterns; even seemingly totally different movements, like deadlifting or overhead pressing. When the going gets tough, your body will know what to do. Okay, so that's the basics done. The groundwork's been laid. You have some solid technical parameters under your belt. Now you need to move on to the actual progressions. Let's take on the ten steps of the prison pushup series.

STEP I: WALL PUSHUPS

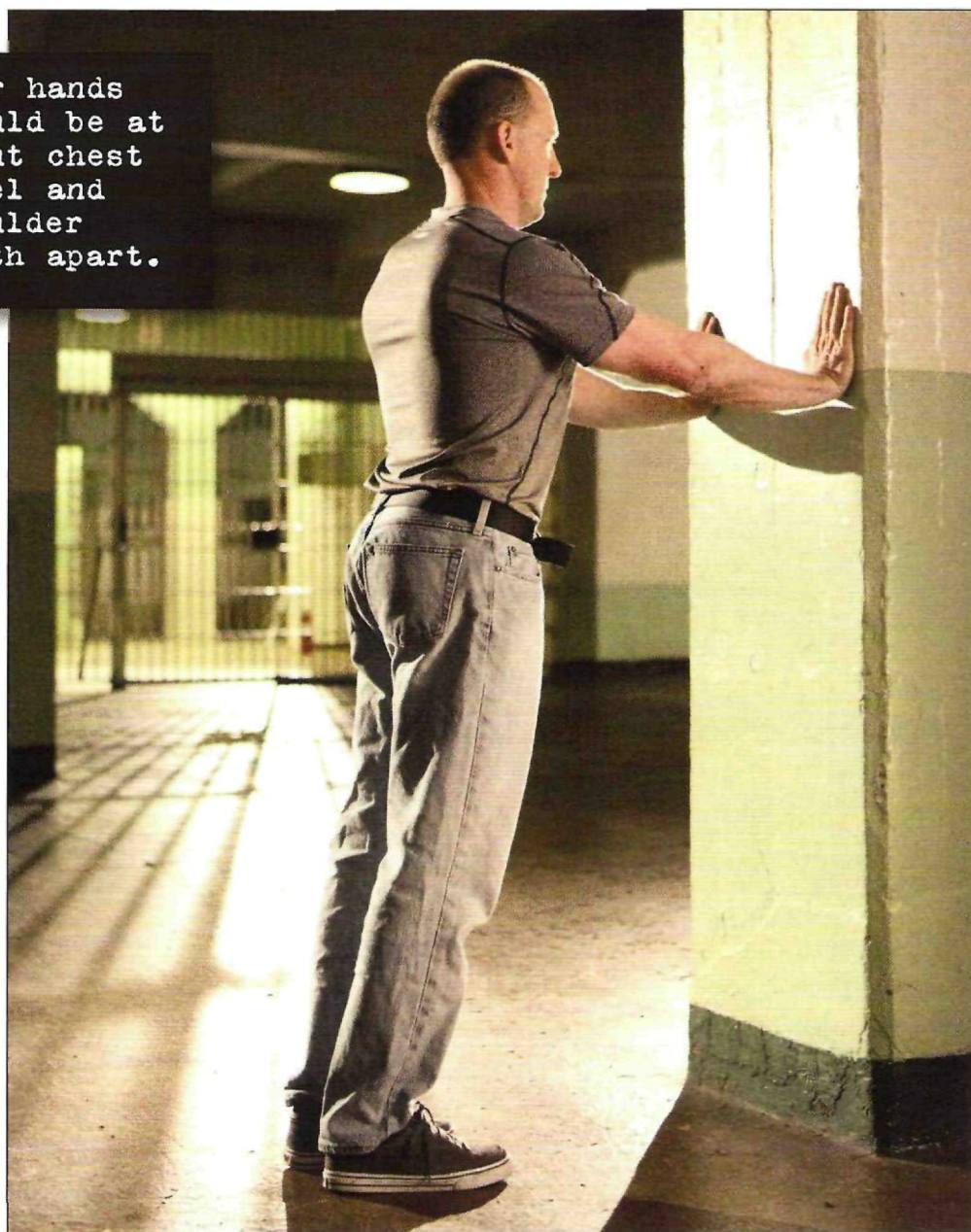
OVERVIEW

We begin at the very beginning, with the first step of pushup series: wall pushups. This is a movement that pretty much anybody should be able to do. This exercise will pump large volumes of nutritious blood through your soft tissues and muscles, and it also improves joint mobility and health, so it's a fantastic rehab exercise if you're coming into calisthenics with pain, stiffness or old injuries in your shoulders, elbows and wrists. If you're going to take your pushups seriously, this is the perfect place to start.

BASIC POSTURE

- Approach a solid wall.
- Stand about two to three foot lengths from the wall.
- Place your hands flat against the wall with your arms straight but “soft”.
- Your hands should be at about chest level and shoulder width apart.
- Keep your body braced and your spine and hips in alignment.

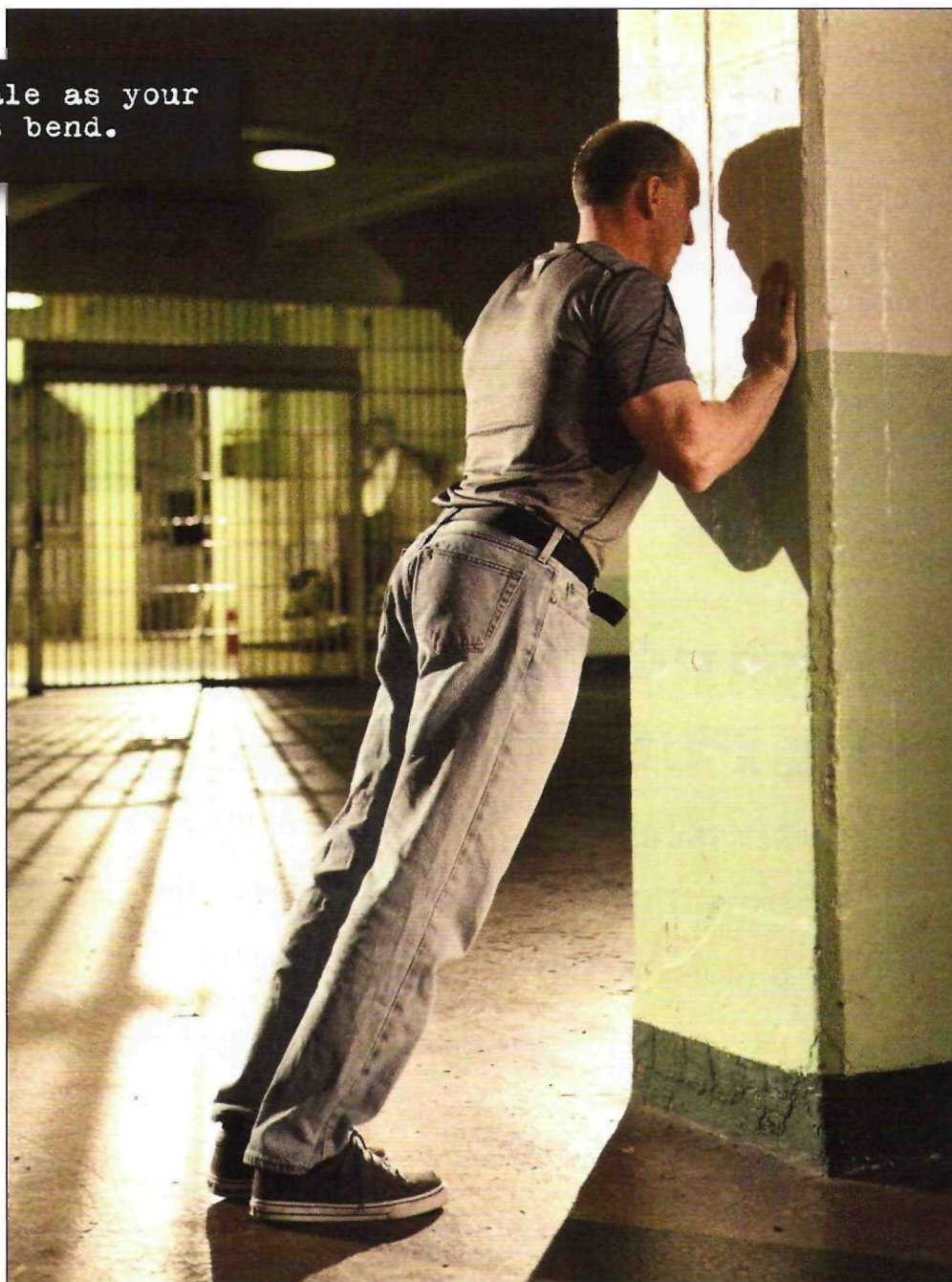
Your hands should be at about chest level and shoulder width apart.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend at the arms and shoulders.
- Inhale as your arms bend.
- Gently touch or come close to the wall with your face or forehead.
- Control your motion at the bottom so you don't hit your mouth or face.

Inhale as your
arms bend.



POSITIVE

- Press through the palms until your arms are straight again.
- Exhale as you push back.
- Keep your body in a straight line and allow your elbows to move naturally.
- Once your arms are straight again, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” WALL PUSHUPS

- Bringing your feet closer to the wall will make the exercise easier
- Standing further from the wall makes the exercise tougher

PROGRESSION LEVELS WALL PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 10 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 25 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 3 sets of 50 |

STEP 2: INCLINE PUSHUPS

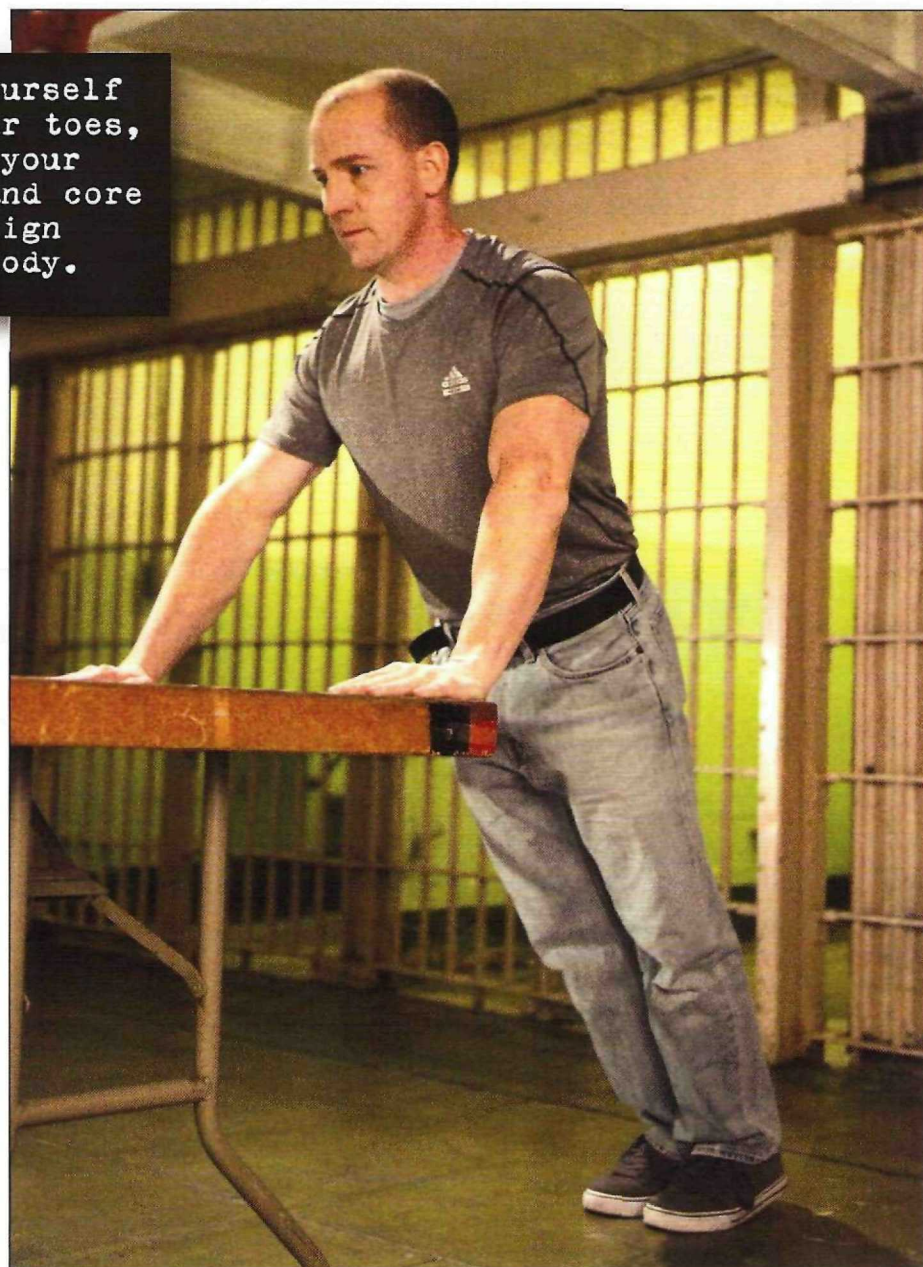
OVERVIEW

Once you can do pushups quite close to the vertical plane, the most progressive way to make things harder is to move your body at more of a diagonal angle towards the ground. This is what incline pushups are all about. Once you've dedicated some training time to wall pushups and your joints and muscle cells are have some fitness and your basic pushing technique is dialled in, it's time to add a little more gravity into the mix.

BASIC POSTURE

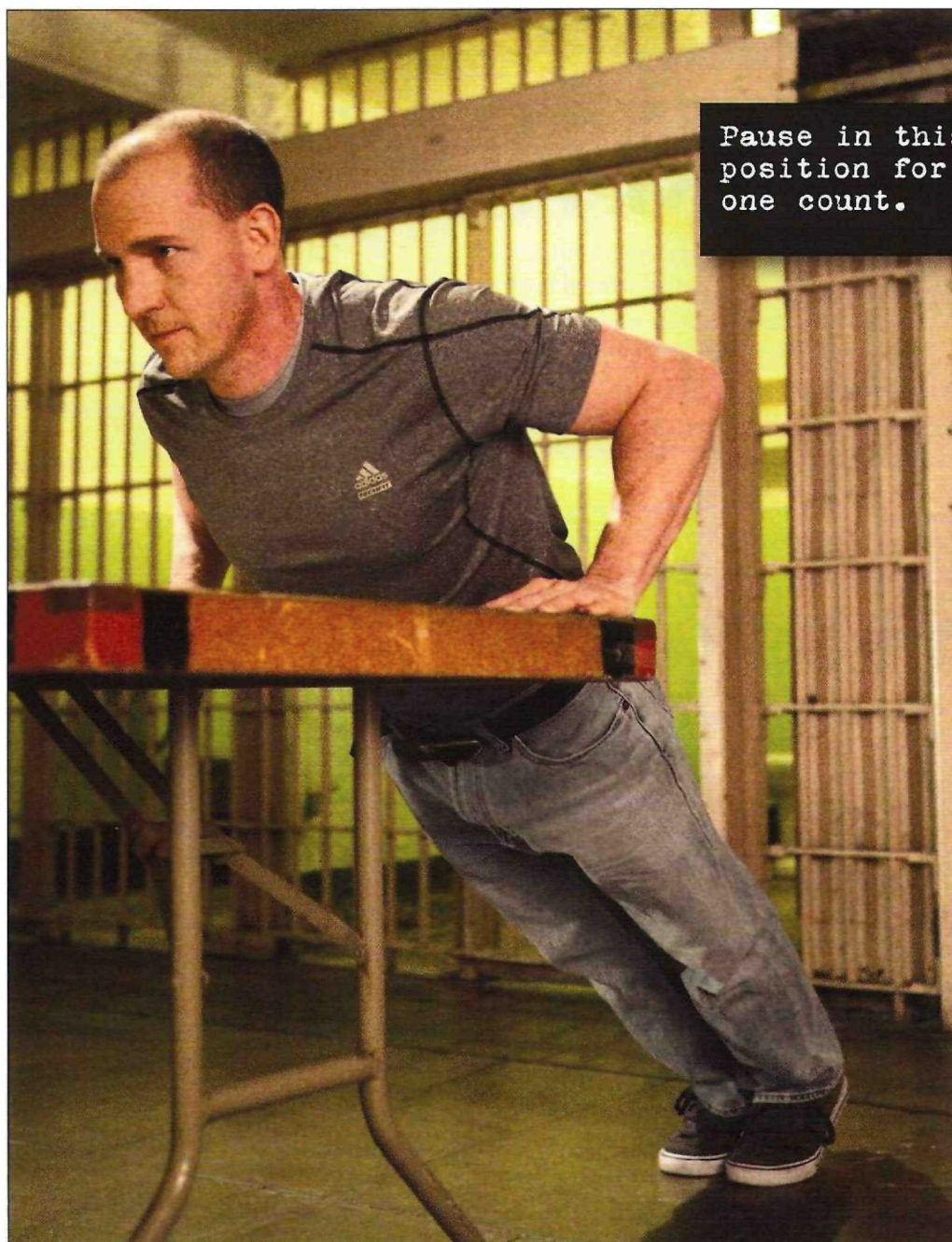
- Find a sturdy, solid base which comes up to about hip height.
- Place both hands firmly on the object in front of you, at about shoulder width.
- Keep your arms straight, but “soft”.
- Move your legs back until they are out straight.
- Set yourself on your toes, brace your legs and core and align your body.

Set yourself
on your toes,
brace your
legs and core
and align
your body.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend at the arms and shoulders under control—don't just “drop”.
- Inhale as your arms bend.
- Continue until your chest gently makes contact with the object.
- Pause in this position for a one count.



Pause in this position for a one count.

POSITIVE

- Press through the palms until your arms are straight again.
- Exhale as you push back.
- Always keep your body in a straight line and allow your elbows to move naturally.
- Once your arms are straight again, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” INCLINE PUSHUPS

- Pushing off a higher platform will make the exercise easier
- Pushing off a platform closer to the ground makes the exercise tougher

PROGRESSION LEVELS INCLINE PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 10 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 20 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 3 sets of 40 reps |

STEP 3: KNEELING PUSHUPS

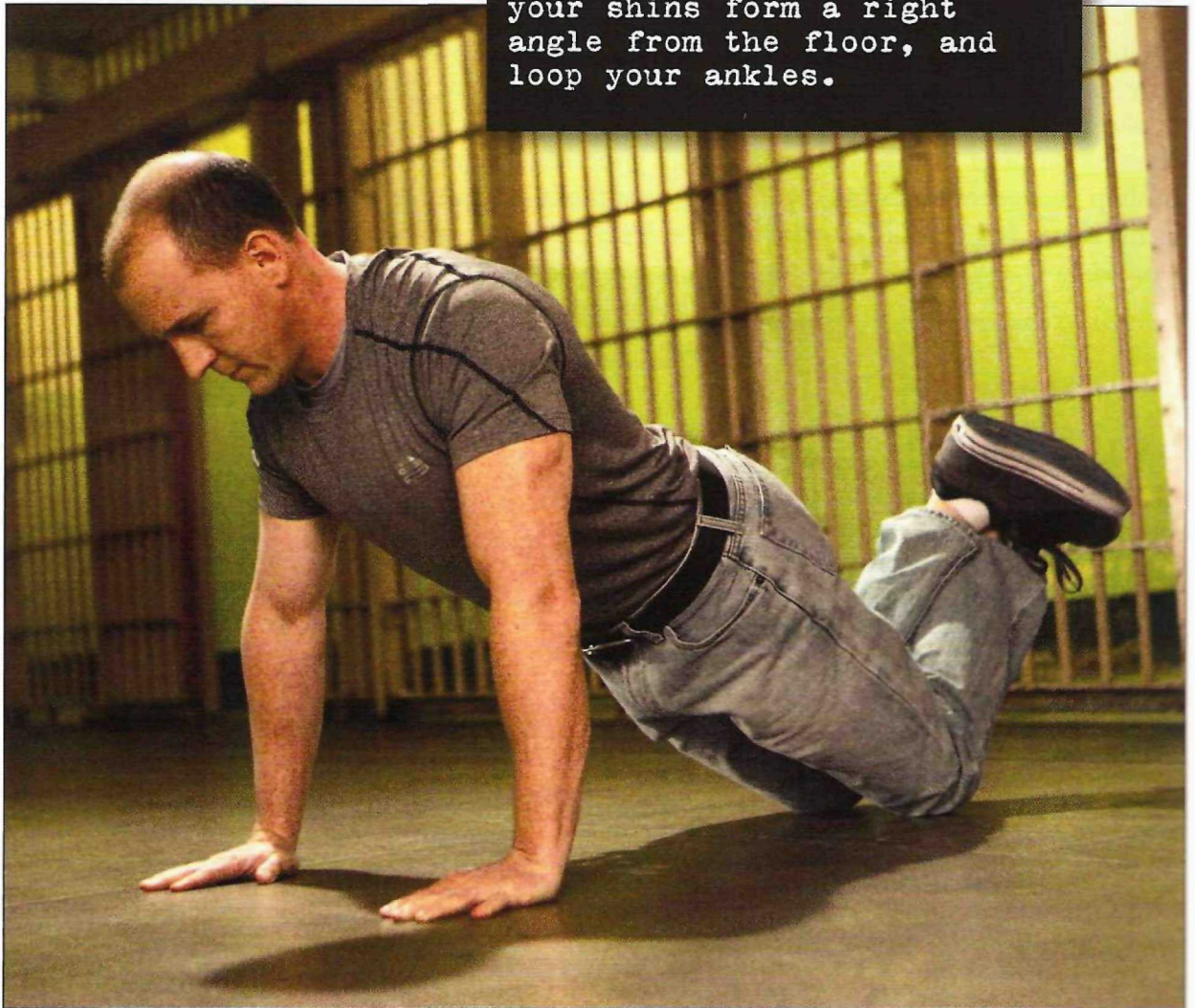
OVERVIEW

Once you're strong enough to really ace incline pushups for fairly high reps, it's time to take things a step further and move down to the floor for kneeling pushups, a classic pushup variation you've probably seen done many times. This move is step three of the pushup series. If you are learning pushups from scratch, which is a good idea for most athletes, this exercise is the first pushup movement performed prone; with your body on the ground. Because it's not as strenuous as the classic full pushup with the feet out, it's the perfect place to start learning great form.

BASIC POSTURE

- Start by kneeling on the floor.
- Place your palms flat on the floor at about shoulder width apart below your chest.
- Keep your arms straight.
- Lift your heels up so that your shins form a right angle from the floor, and loop your ankles.

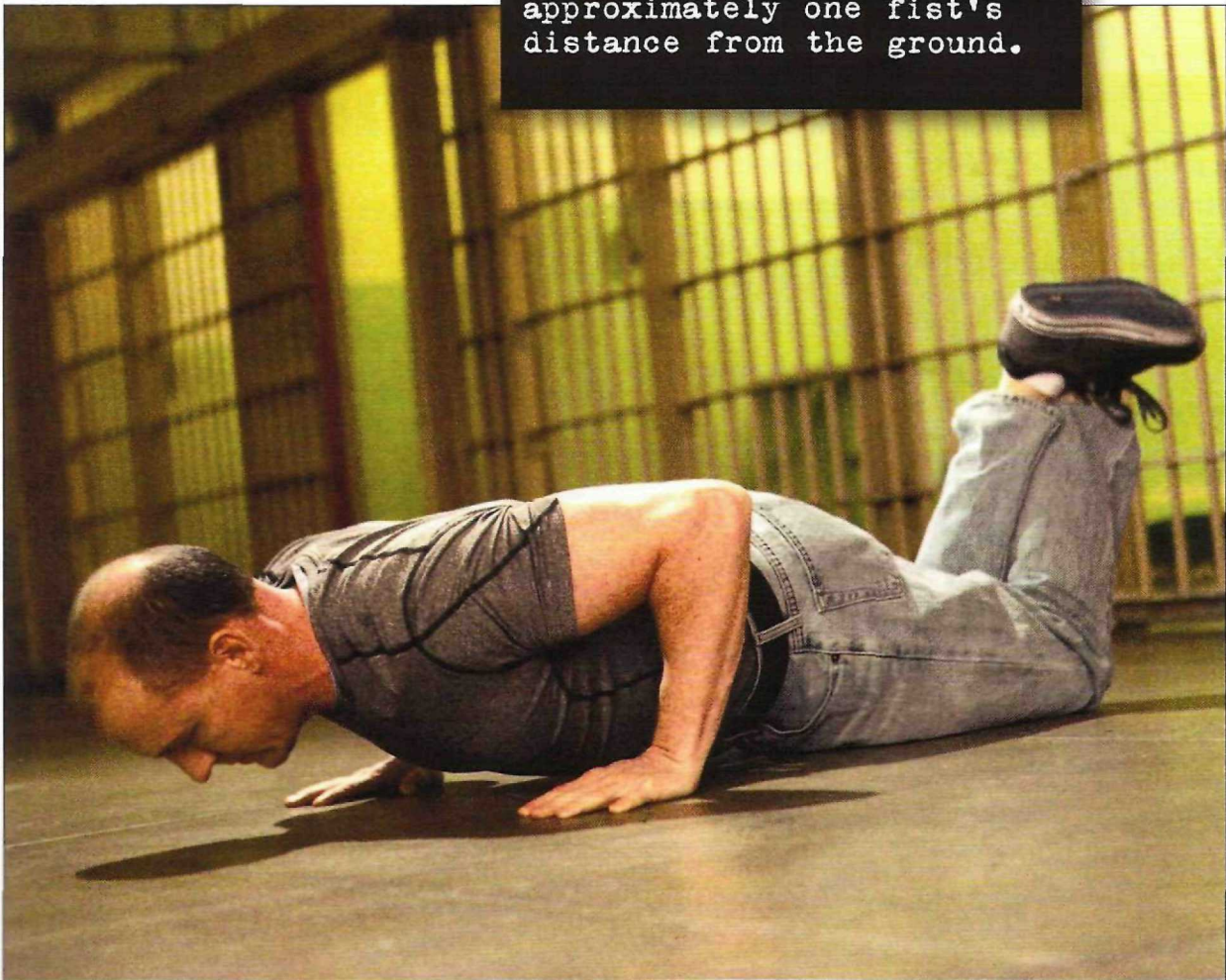
Lift your heels up so that your shins form a right angle from the floor, and loop your ankles.



NEGATIVE

- Using your knees as a pivot point, smoothly bend at the shoulders and arms.
- Inhale as you descend.
- Stop when your chest is approximately one fist's distance from the ground.
- Pause in this position, under tension.

Stop when your chest is approximately one fist's distance from the ground.



POSITIVE

- Press through the palms until your arms are straight again.
- Exhale as you push back.
- Always keep your body in a straight line and allow your elbows to move naturally.
- Once your arms are straight again, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” KNEELING PUSHUPS

- Performing kneeling pushups off a slight incline will make the exercise easier
- Pushing fully prone on the ground makes the exercise tougher

PROGRESSION LEVELS KNEELING PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 10 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 15 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 3 sets of 30 reps |

STEP 4: HALF PUSHUPS

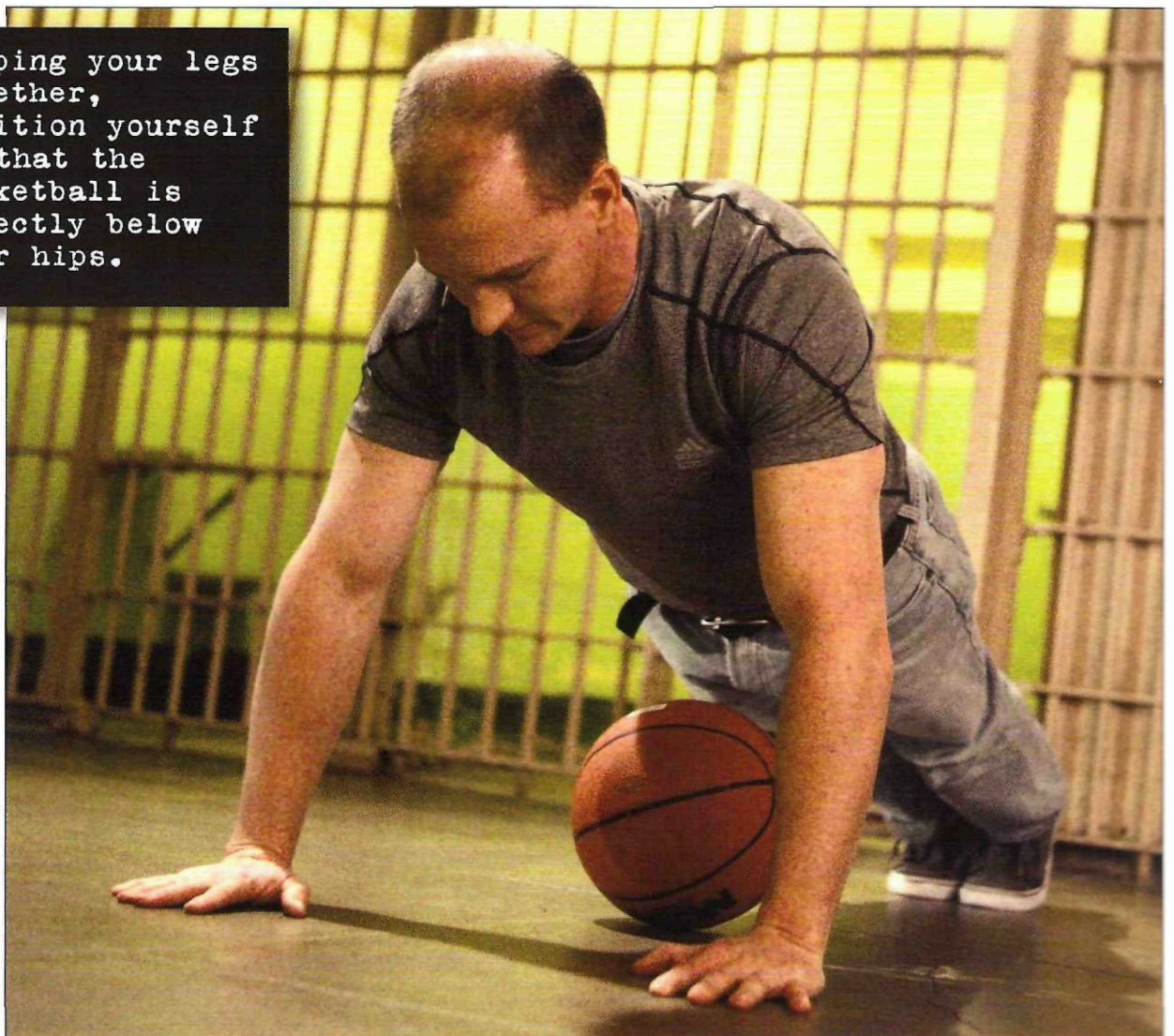
OVERVIEW

Step 4 of the Convict Conditioning pushup series is half pushups. Many athletes launch straight into full pushups half-assed. Maybe their form is weak, or their joints aren't quite as strong as they should be. This is an excellent exercise to build training momentum before getting into regular full pushups. If you've been doing pushups a while but you find them tough or your form is only so-so, when it should be great, you really need to take a step back and go to work on half pushups.

BASIC POSTURE

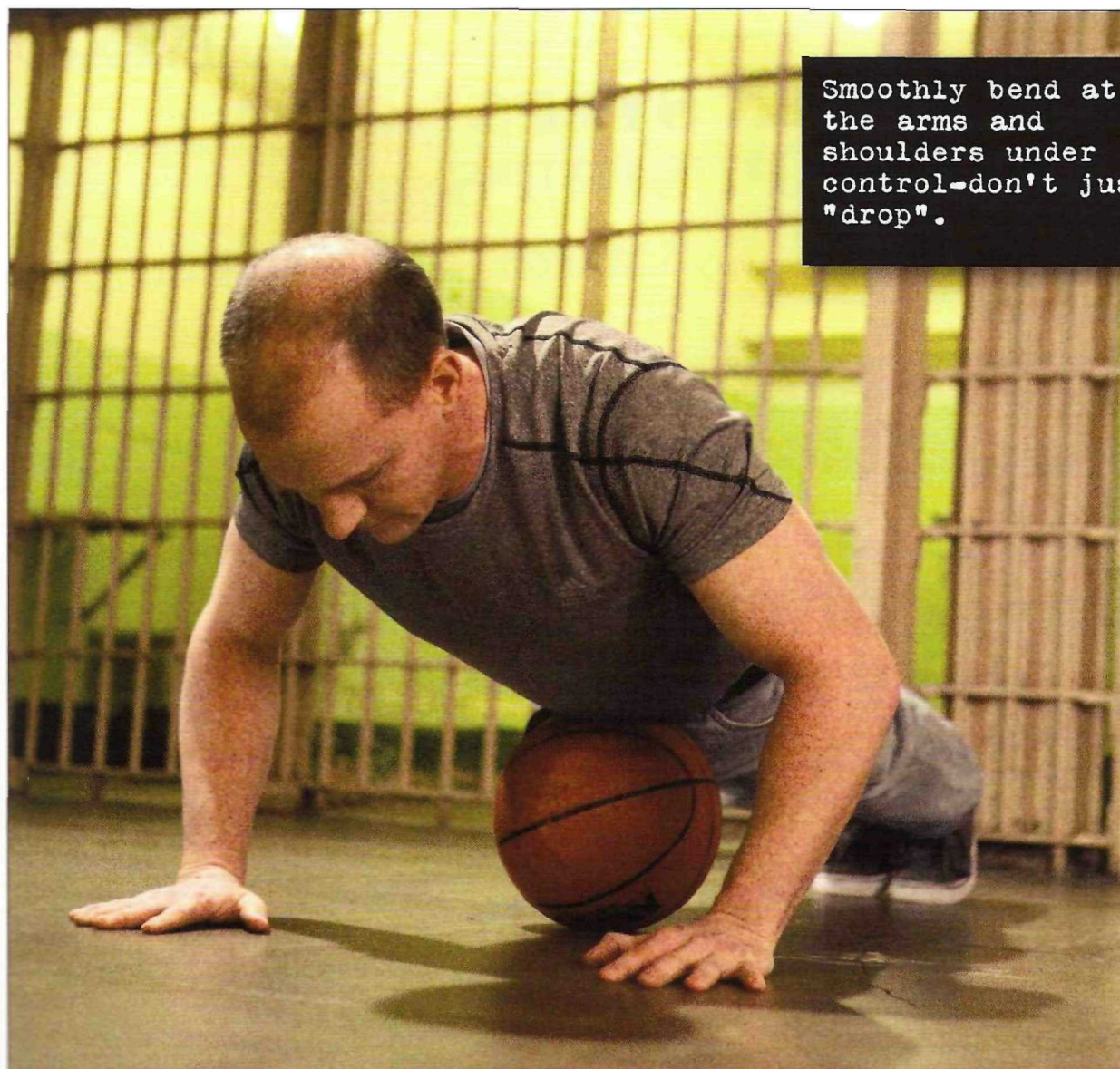
- Kneel on the floor with a basketball in front of you.
- Place your palms on the floor, arms straight.
- Your hands should be approximately shoulder width, and below your upper chest.
- Move your legs back until they are out straight behind you.
- Keeping your legs together, position yourself so that the basketball is directly below your hips.
- Set yourself on your toes, brace your legs and core and align your body.

Keeping your legs together, position yourself so that the basketball is directly below your hips.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend at the arms and shoulders under control—don't just “drop”.
- Inhale as you go down.
- Continue until your hips gently make contact with the basketball.
- Pause in this position for a one count.



Smoothly bend at the arms and shoulders under control—don't just “drop”.

POSITIVE

- Press through the palms until your arms are straight again.
- Exhale as you push back.
- Keep your body in a straight line and allow your elbows to move naturally.
- Once your arms are straight again, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” HALF PUSHUPS

- Performing your pushups with the ball further towards your feet will make the exercise easier
- Performing your pushups with the ball further towards your head will make the exercise tougher

PROGRESSION LEVELS HALF PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 8 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 12 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 25 reps |

STEP 5: FULL PUSHUPS

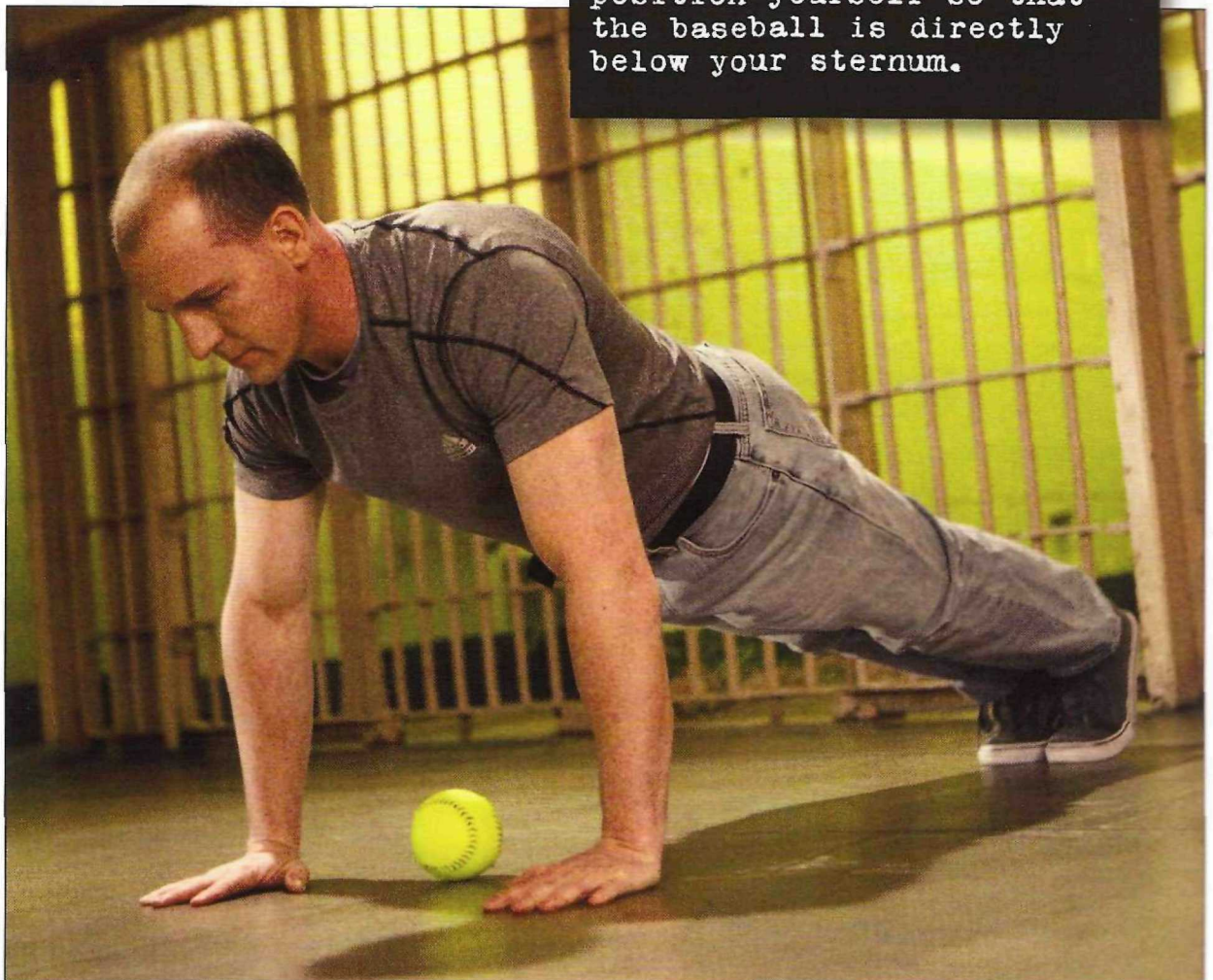
OVERVIEW

The half pushup exercise will have conditioned your torso to stay aligned and braced properly in the pushup position. It will have conditioned your shoulders and wrists to the demands of pushups. Now it's time to go deeper, and perform full pushups. Full pushups require a greater bend of the shoulder and elbow, so it builds greater strength in the chest, shoulders and triceps than the preceding steps. Let's see how it's done right.

BASIC POSTURE

- Kneel on the floor with a baseball or tennis ball in front of you.
- Place your palms on the floor, arms straight.
- Your hands should be approximately shoulder width, and below your upper chest.
- Move your legs back until they are out straight behind you.
- Keeping your legs together position yourself so that the baseball is directly below your sternum.
- Set yourself on your toes, brace your legs and core and align your body.

Keeping your legs together position yourself so that the baseball is directly below your sternum.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend at the arms and shoulders under full control.
- Inhale as you go down.
- Continue until your chest gently makes contact with the baseball.
- Pause in this position for a one count.

Continue until your chest
gently makes contact with
the baseball.



POSITIVE

- Press through the palms until your arms are straight again.
- Exhale as you push back.
- Once your arms are straight again, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” FULL PUSHUPS

- Performing full pushups off a slight incline will make the exercise easier
- Pushing fully prone on the ground makes the exercise tougher

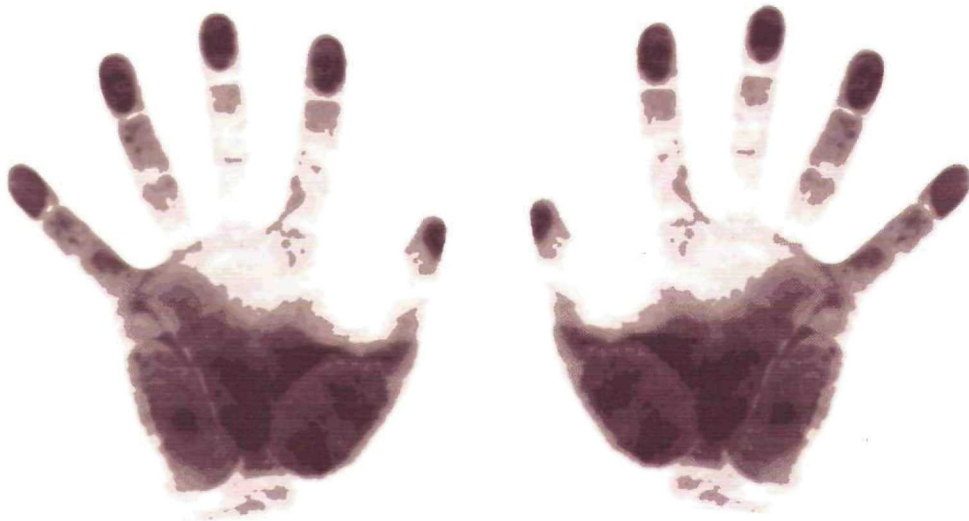
PROGRESSION LEVELS FULL PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 5 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 10 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 20 reps |

STEP 6: CLOSE PUSHUPS

OVERVIEW

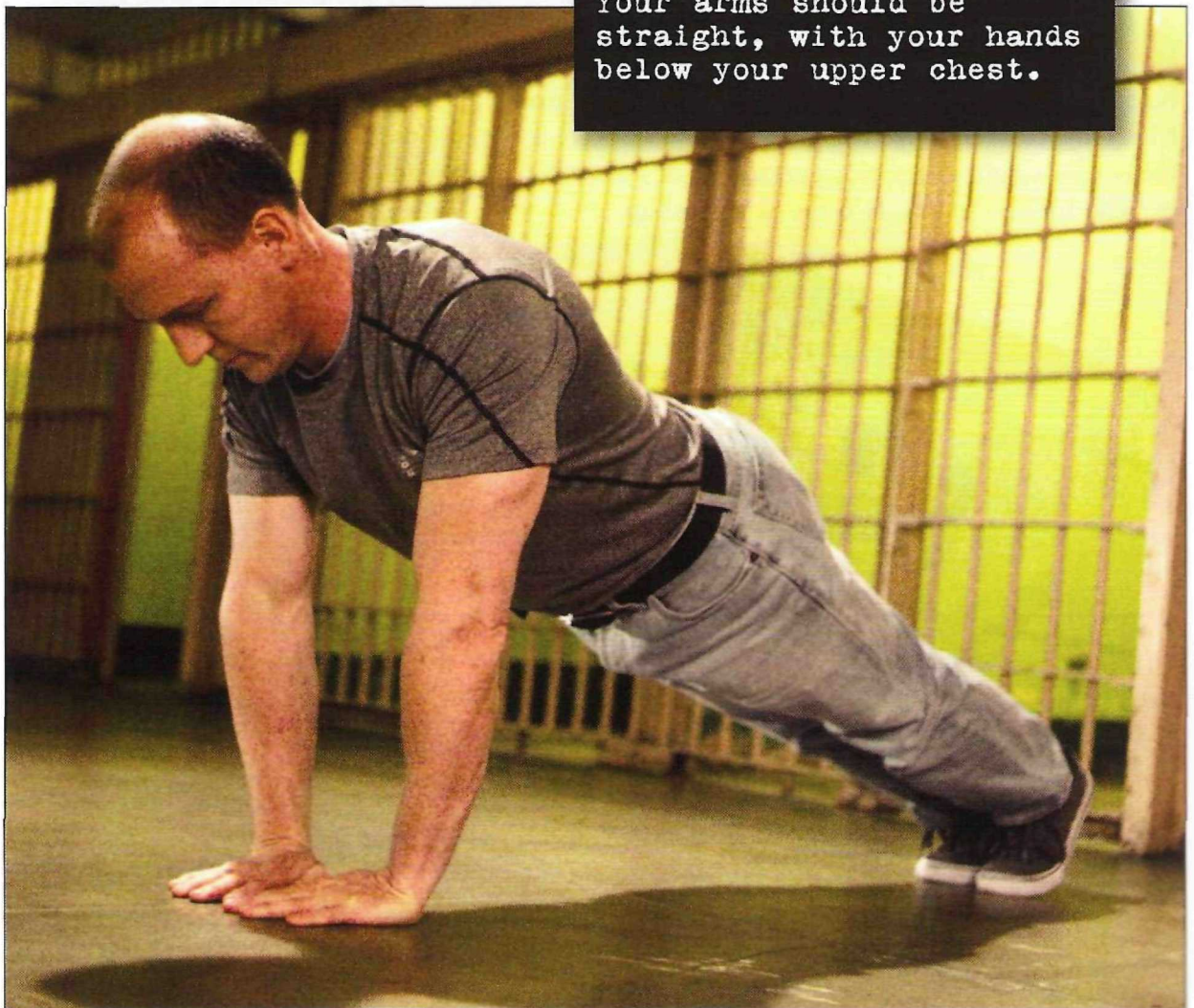
Once you have mastered classic full pushups with two arms, it's time to specifically train your joints and tendons to get strong enough to take on the uneven work which is coming shortly. The best way to strengthen the wrist and elbows is by bringing the hands close during your pushups. Mastering close pushups will give you elbows of steel, because the arms are forced to take more of the body's weight under much greater angles when you push with your hands together. So the next exercise for you to master is the close pushup.



BASIC POSTURE

- Start face down onto the ground.
- Place your palms flat on the floor, with your thumbs or fingers touching.
- Your arms should be straight, with your hands below your upper chest.
- Keeping them together, move your legs out straight behind you.
- Set yourself on your toes, and keep your legs, hips and torso in a straight line.

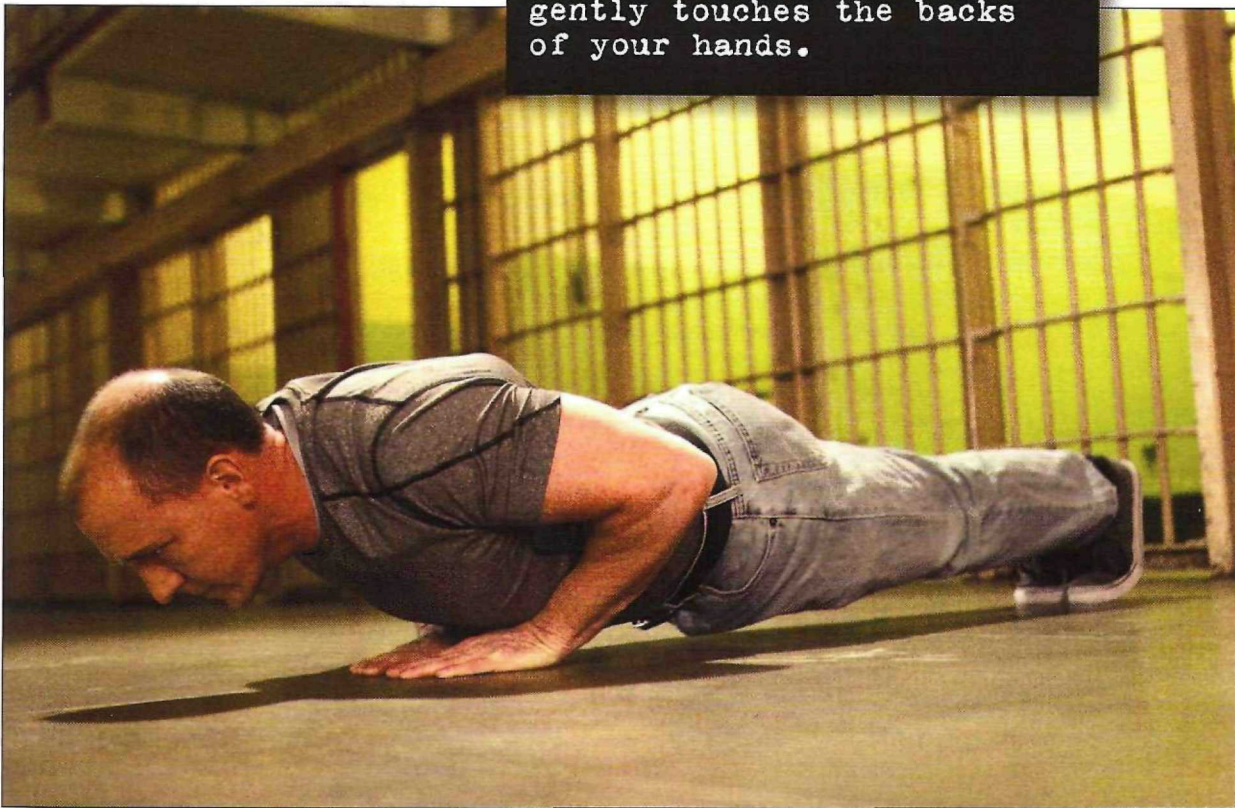
Your arms should be straight, with your hands below your upper chest.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend at the arms and shoulders under full control.
- Inhale as you go down.
- Continue until your chest gently touches the backs of your hands.
- Pause in this position for a one count.

Continue until your chest
gently touches the backs
of your hands.



POSITIVE

- Press through the palms until your arms are straight again.
- Exhale as you push back.
- Allow your elbows to stay close to your torso throughout the exercise.
- Once your arms are straight again, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” CLOSE PUSHUPS

- Continue performing pushups with your hands under your shoulders
- Every time you meet your rep goal, bring your hands an inch closer
- Before long, you will be in the close pushup position.

PROGRESSION LEVELS CLOSE PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 5 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 10 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 20 reps |

STEP 7: UNEVEN PUSHUPS

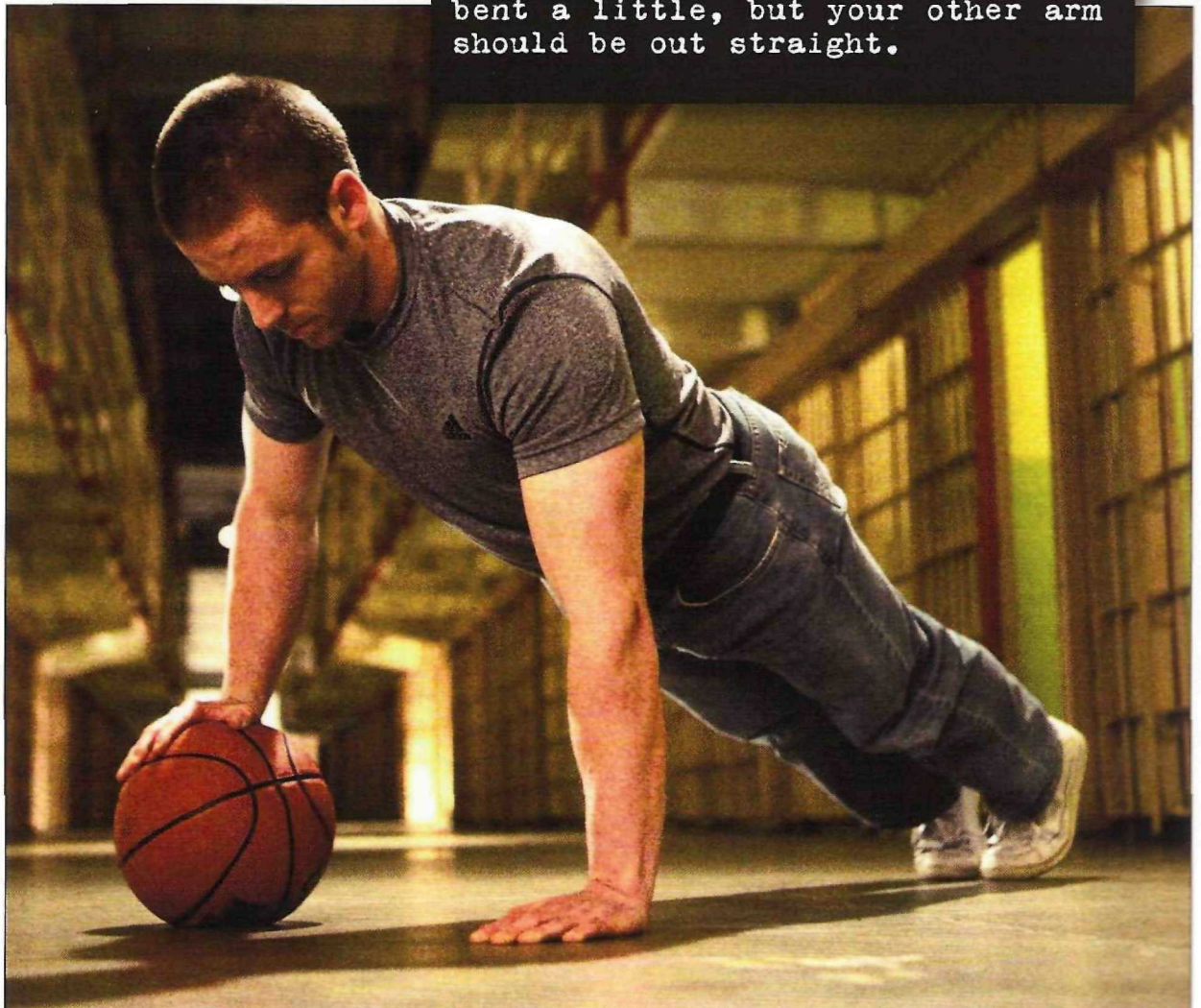
OVERVIEW

So far, you've done your pushups evenly with two arms. Exercises done this way, involving both limbs evenly are called "bilateral" exercises. Bilateral bodyweight exercises are superb for building a great base of strength, conditioning and joint integrity, but if you want to move on to unilateral work, work involving only one arm or leg, you need to spend some time working on special transitional exercises which gradually acclimatize you muscles, joints and nervous system to one-limb work. Uneven pushups are a great example of this kind of a transitional exercise. They still involve both limbs, but now one limb is going to be doing more work than the other. Okay, let's go.

BASIC POSTURE

- Kneel on the floor with a basketball in front of you.
- Place one palm on the floor, one securely on the basketball.
- Your ball-arm will have to be bent a little, but your other arm should be out straight.
- Move your legs back into the pushup position.
- Both your hands should be directly below your shoulders.
- Once you've found your balance, try to spread your bodyweight evenly through both palms.

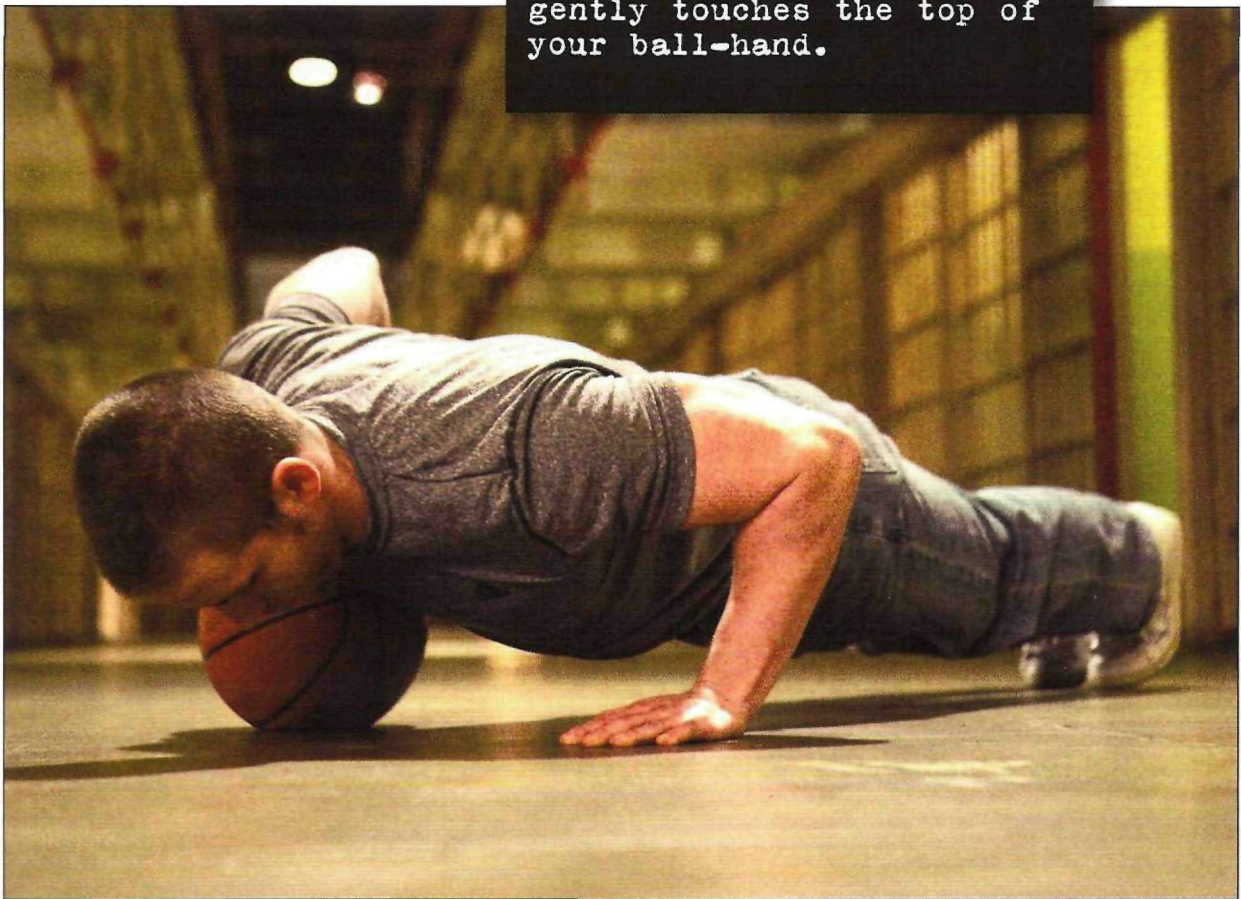
Your ball-arm will have to be bent a little, but your other arm should be out straight.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend at the arms and shoulders under full control.
- Continue until your chest gently touches the top of your ball-hand.
- Pause in this position for a one count.

Continue until your chest
gently touches the top of
your ball-hand.



POSITIVE

- Press through both palms until you are in the top position again.
- Allow your elbows to move naturally throughout the exercise.
- Once you get back to the top position, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” UNEVEN PUSHUPS

- Begin by using stable objects which are lower than a basketball (like a book or a brick, etc.)
- As you become accustomed to the uneven pushup, gradually add books or bricks until the pile is the same height as a basketball
- Now attempt the basketball again

PROGRESSION LEVELS UNEVEN PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 5 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 10 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 20 reps |

STEP 8: ½ ONE-ARM PUSHUPS

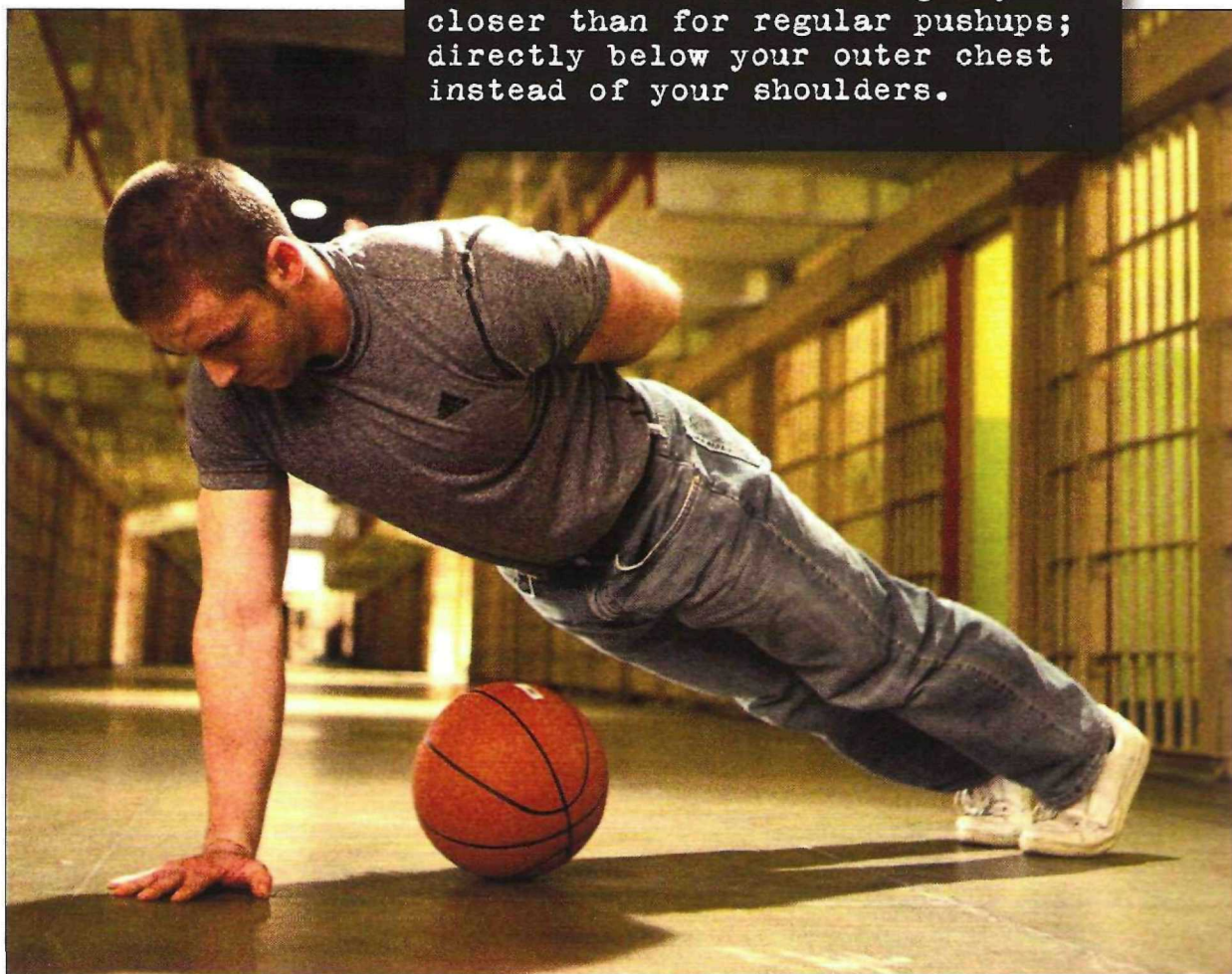
OVERVIEW

Once you've milked uneven pushups for all they have to offer you, it's time to take a big move forwards in your training, and start the completely unilateral, one arm work. You're ready to start doing your pushups on one arm only. This is a big step, and a real achievement. But it's probably unrealistic for most people to begin doing full one-arm pushups at this stage; the bottom position is just too hard. That's why it's a great idea to work into *full* one-arm pushups through this next step, step eight: ½ one-arm pushups.

BASIC POSTURE

- Kneel on the floor with a basketball in front of you.
- Place your palms on the floor, arms straight.
- Your hands should be slightly closer than for regular pushups; directly below your outer chest instead of your shoulders.
- Move your legs back until they are out straight behind you, and the basketball is directly below your hips.
- Shift your bodyweight until it's mostly going through one hand, then place the other hand in the small of your back.
- Brace your body so that it stays in a straight line, and doesn't twist to the side.

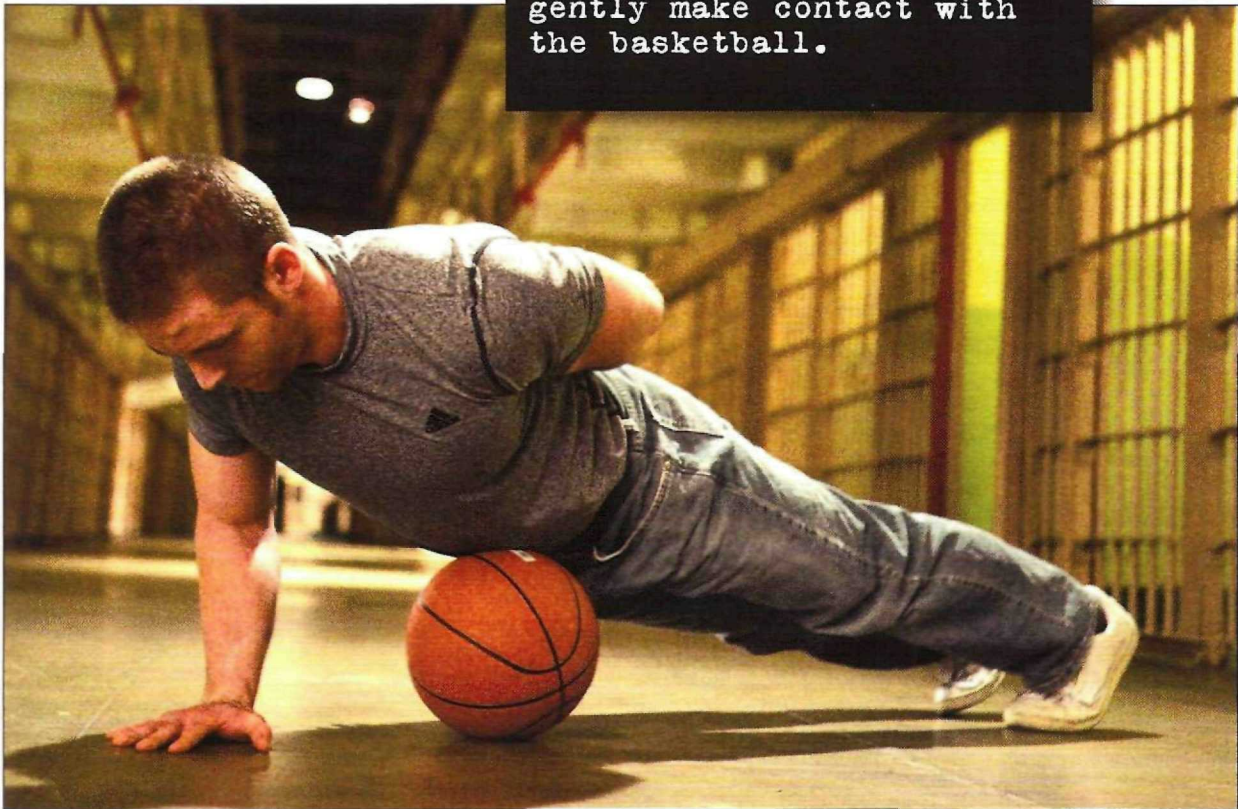
Your hands should be slightly closer than for regular pushups; directly below your outer chest instead of your shoulders.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend your working arm under control.
- Continue until your hips gently make contact with the basketball.
- Pause in this position for a one count.

Continue until your hips
gently make contact with
the basketball.



POSITIVE

- Press through the palm until your arm is straight again.
- Keep your body in a straight line and allow your elbow to move naturally.
- Once your arm is straight again, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS”

1/2 ONE-ARM PUSHUPS

- Performing ½ one-arm pushups with the ball further towards your feet will make the exercise easier
- Performing ½ one-arm pushups with the ball further towards your head will make the exercise tougher

PROGRESSION LEVELS

1/2 ONE-ARM PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 5 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 10 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 20 reps |

STEP 9: LEVER PUSHUPS

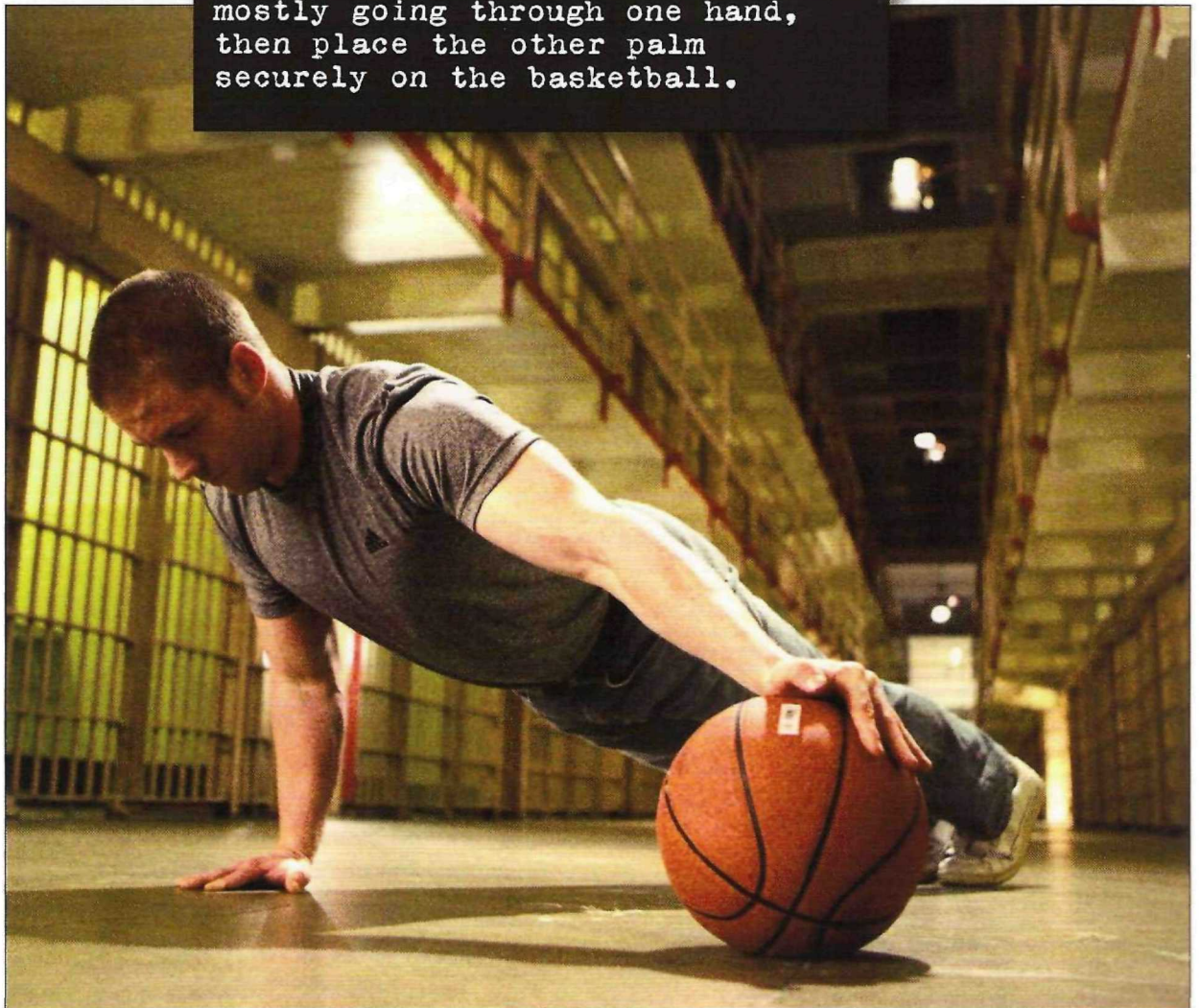
OVERVIEW

Once you're comfortable with $\frac{1}{2}$ one-arm pushups, it means that your muscles and tendons already possess the strength to execute the top half of the one-arm pushup. That's taken care of. So before moving to full one-arm pushups, it makes some sense for a bodyweight athlete to take some time working on a technique which will help build strength in the much harder *bottom* half of the one-arm pushup, the half where you are closest to the ground. That's the whole purpose behind step nine, lever pushups.

BASIC POSTURE

- Kneel on the floor with a basketball diagonally out beside you.
- Get into the classic pushup position; legs together, body and arms straight.
- Your hands should be slightly closer than for regular pushups; directly below your outer chest instead of your shoulders.
- Shift your bodyweight until it's mostly going through one hand, then place the other palm securely on the basketball.
- The basketball should be directly out to your side, and as far away as you can reach while keeping both arms straight and your palm flat over the ball.

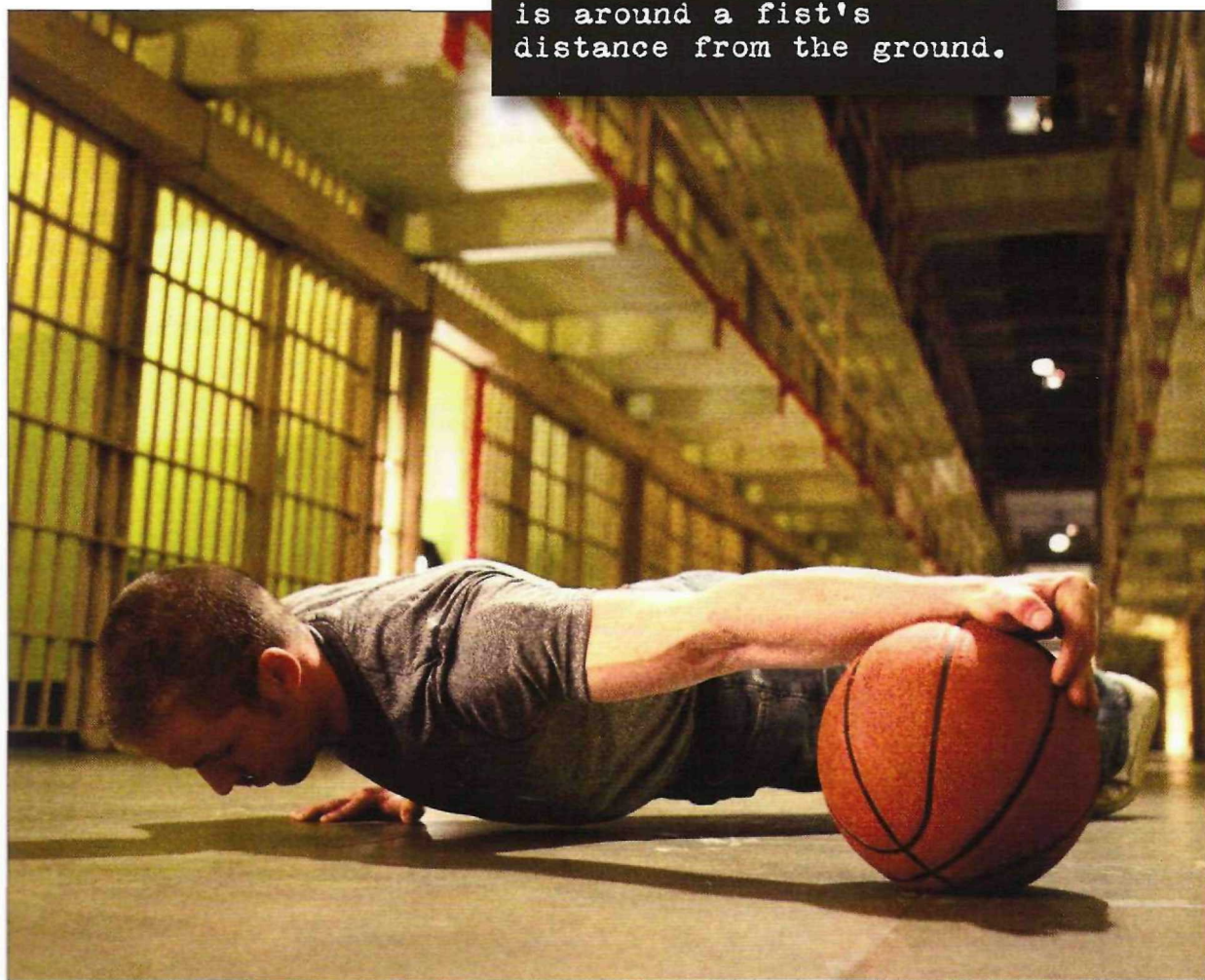
Shift your bodyweight until it's mostly going through one hand, then place the other palm securely on the basketball.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend your working arm under control.
- As you descend, your ball-arm will move further out to the side as the basketball rolls underneath it.
- Continue until your chest is around a fist's distance from the ground.
- Pause in this position for a one count.

Continue until your chest is around a fist's distance from the ground.



POSITIVE

- Press through the floor with your palm, and down through the ball using your hand and wrist.
- Continue until you have pushed yourself back to the starting position.
- Once your working arm is straight again, repeat the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” LEVER PUSHUPS

- To improve leverage on this exercise, bend the arm which is on the ball—this will allow you to push harder through the ball
- As your arms get stronger from workout to workout, extend your ball arm until it's straight
- NOTE: Don't bend your ball arm too much, or you'll wind up doing step 7: uneven pushups

PROGRESSION LEVELS LEVER PUSHUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 5 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 10 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 20 reps |

STEP 10: MASTER STEP ONE-ARM PUSHUPS

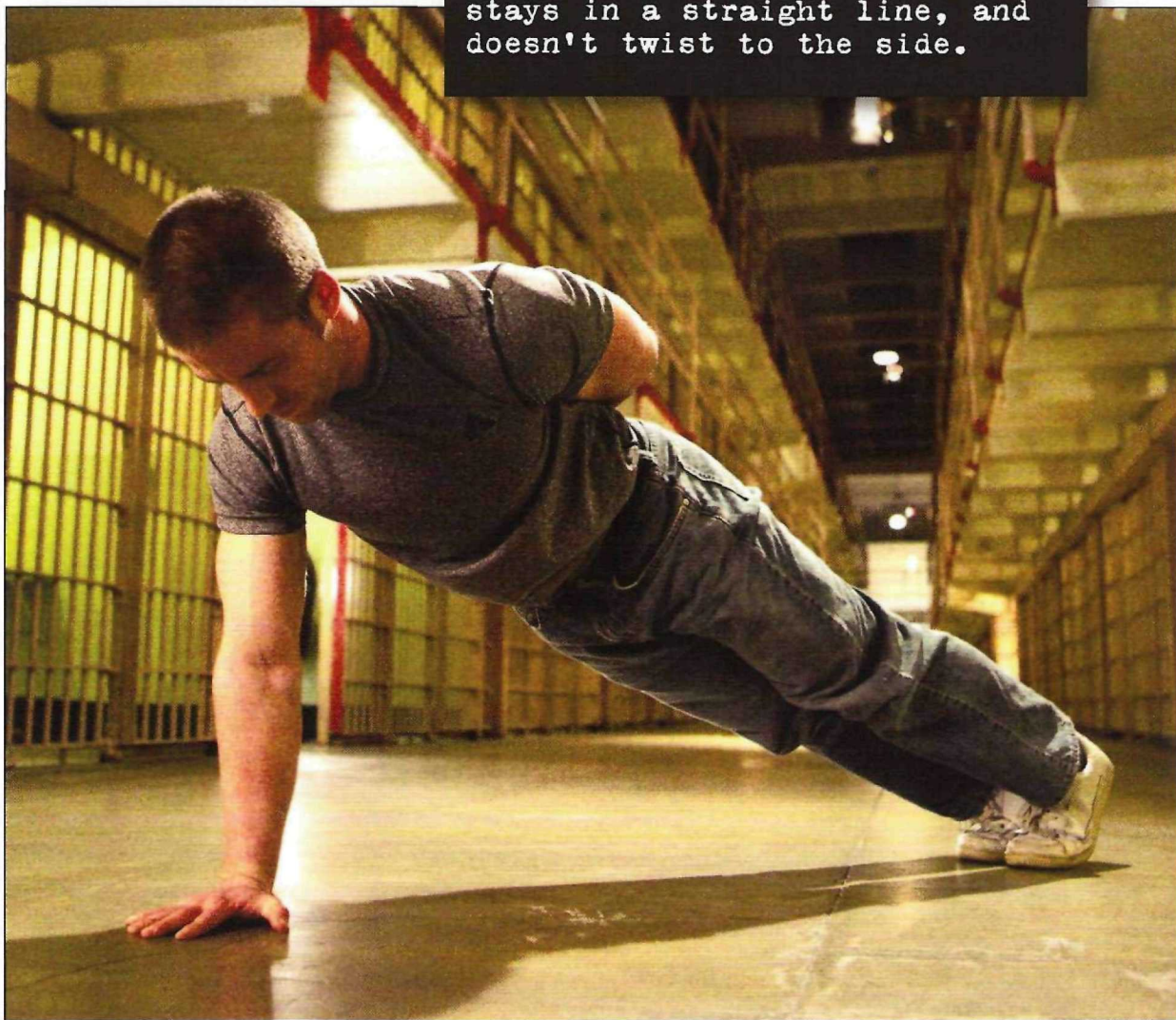
OVERVIEW

So, here we are. The one-arm pushup. The special form of pushup we're about to show you is very old, but is rarely seen in modern gyms. It's sometimes called the "prison pushup", because it's based on the kind of one-arm pushups often found in jails and used by prison athletes up and down the land. You might see many athletes who can perform the conventional one-arm pushup, with the feet splayed out, but the prison pushup is much, much harder, because the legs and feet must be kept together. Most people don't realize just how difficult this technique is. Whereas one in fifty athletes can perform a conventional one-arm pushup correctly, less than one in ten thousand really own the prison-style one-arm pushup with the feet together. So don't expect to master the one-arm prison pushup after just a few weeks. This move, like all the Master Steps, deserves maximum respect. It is an elite level strength feat. Put in the time, the effort, be disciplined and look after your body and you will get there where others fail.

BASIC POSTURE

- Get into the classic pushup position; body aligned and arms straight.
- Your feet and legs must be close together.
- Shift your bodyweight until it's mostly going through one hand, then place the other hand in the small of your back.
- Brace your body so that it stays in a straight line, and doesn't twist to the side.

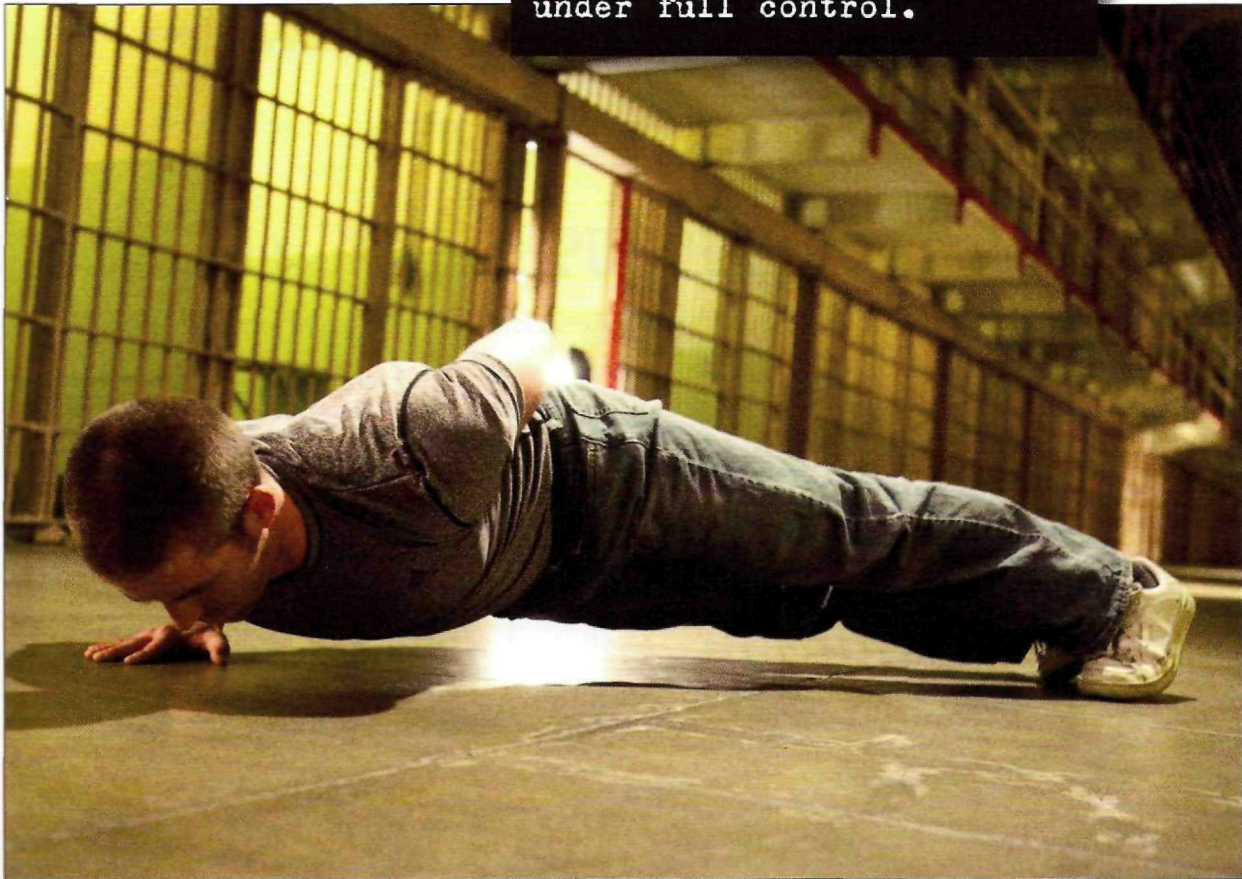
Brace your body so that it stays in a straight line, and doesn't twist to the side.



NEGATIVE

- Smoothly bend your arm under full control.
- Inhale as you go down.
- Continue until your chest is around a fist's distance from the ground.

Smoothly bend your arm
under full control.



POSITIVE

- Press hard through the palm and fingers.
- Your body may bend to the side, but it should not twist towards the ground.
- Exhale as you push back.
- Once your arm is straight again, repeat the exercise.

PUSHUP SERIES SUMMARY

For ease of reference, let's take a look at the ten steps of the pushup series all together.

STEP 1: WALL PUSHUPS

Step one: Wall pushups. Build to three sets of fifty. Then begin;

STEP 2: INCLINE PUSHUPS

Step two: Incline pushups. Build to three sets of forty. Then move to;

STEP 3: KNEELING PUSHUPS

Step three: Kneeling pushups. Build to three sets of thirty. Then begin;

STEP 4: HALF PUSHUPS

Step four: Half pushups. Build to two sets of twenty-five. Then move to;

STEP 5: FULL PUSHUPS

Step five: Full pushups. Build to two sets of twenty. Then begin;

STEP 6: INCLINE PUSHUPS

Step six: Close pushups. Build to two sets of twenty. Then start;

STEP 7: UNEVEN PUSHUPS

Step seven: Uneven pushups. Build to two sets of twenty. Then move to;

STEP 8: $\frac{1}{2}$ ONE-ARM PUSHUPS

Step eight: $\frac{1}{2}$ one-arm pushups. Build to two sets of twenty. Then go to;

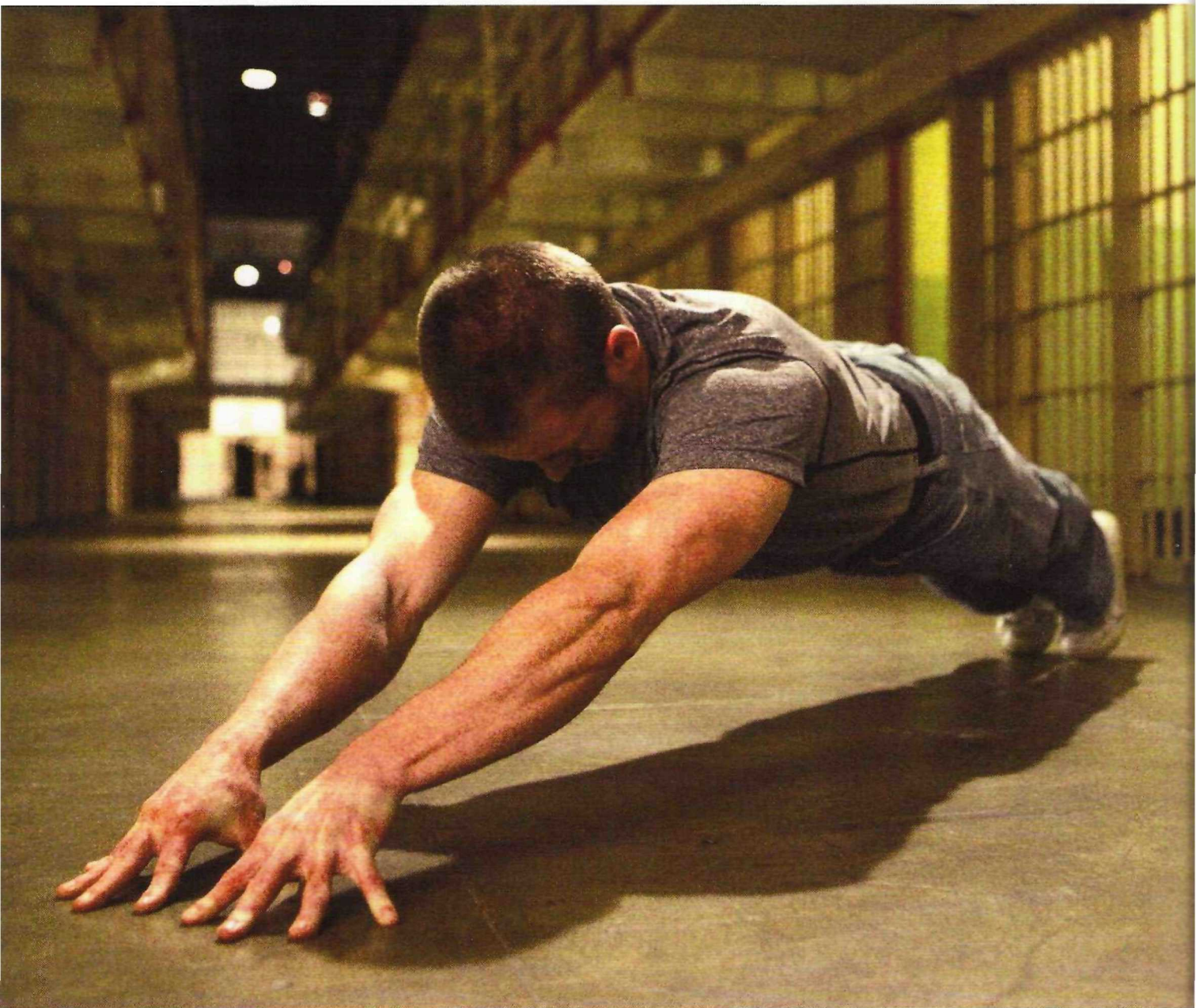
STEP 9: LEVER PUSHUPS

Step nine: Lever pushups. Build to two sets of twenty. Then finally advance to;

STEP 10: MASTER STEP ONE-ARM PUSHUPS

Step ten, you've reached the Master Step: One-arm pushups.

CELL 3:
THE
VARIANTS



CELL 3: THE VARIANTS



Okay, now we've shown you the basic ten movements of the pushup series. Remember that these basic ten can be broken up into dozens more exercises by using very slight technical variations—changes in hand position, elbow angle, and so on. We discussed these changes in the “hidden step” sections following each exercise.

But as well as these basic ten, there are other types of technique, pushup movements or exercises which work similar muscle groups, which it's helpful to have inside your training toolkit.

For example, most of the Convict Conditioning exercises are performed with a slower, smoother cadence, because this builds superior strength and muscle, and also protects the joints and soft tissues over the long-term. But in reality we don't always move in a very regulated, smooth way. We might have to accelerate quickly for sport or in combat; or at the opposite end of the spectrum, we might have to hold a position statically under tension for a time. For this reason, we've included at least one explosive variant, and one isometric hold variation for every movement type in these DVDs. This is true for pushups, squats and all the other movements.

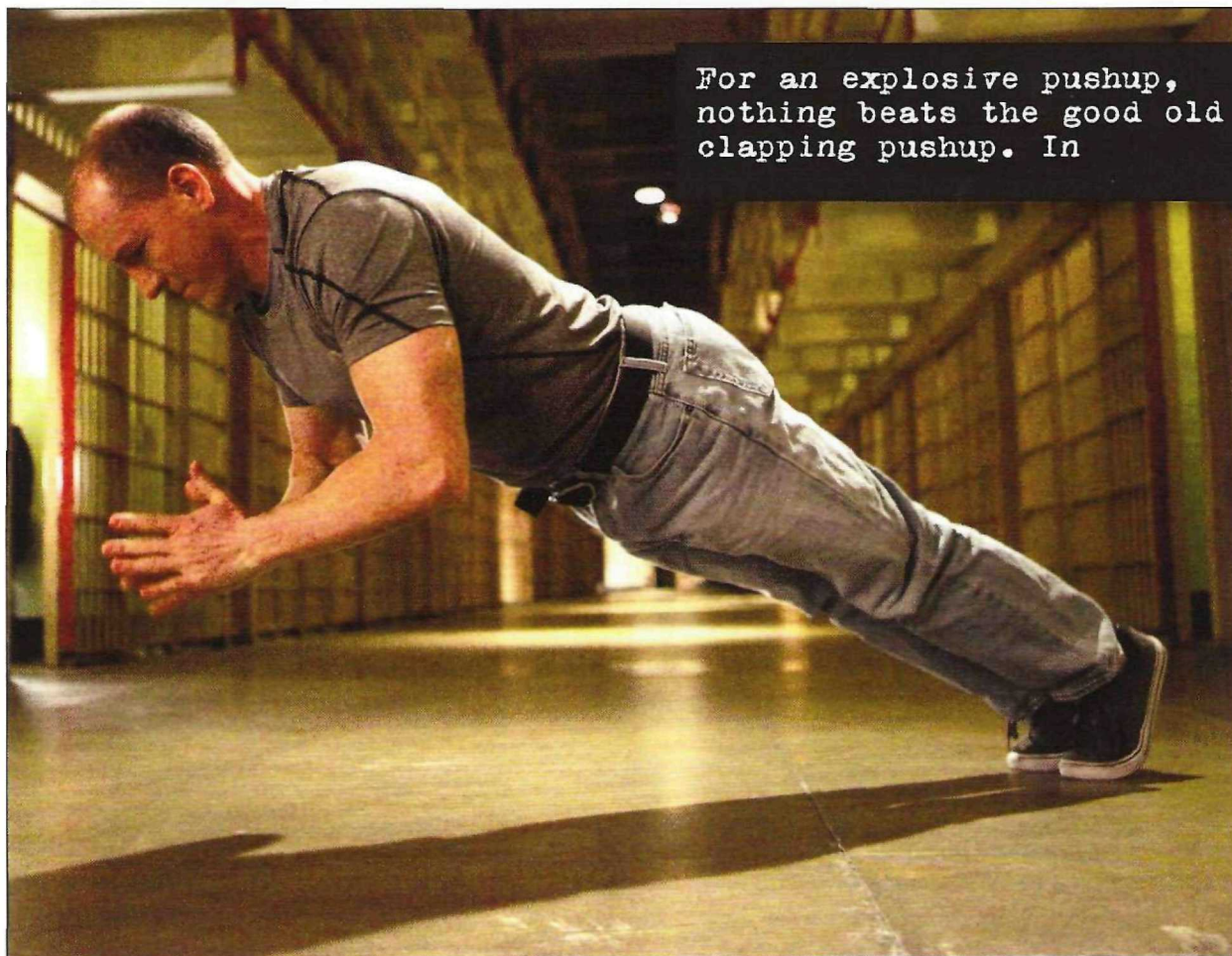
You don't necessarily have to perform *any* of these variant exercises, but you might want to add one to your routine for variety, or to help with your sport of fighting art, or just to explore for fun when you get burnt out on a particular movement.

The human body is a hugely complex machine, and there are lots of excellent or useful variant exercises in calisthenics. Some of those included here are discussed in the Convict Conditioning manual, some will be new. Let's take a look at some of the pushup variants.

CLAPPING PUSHUPS

OVERVIEW

For every movement type you regularly use, such as the standard pushup, you should also have at least one explosive variant in your toolkit. For an explosive pushup, nothing beats the good old clapping pushup. In some circles this is called a plyometric, or “plyo” pushup, but whatever you call it, it boils down to the same thing. Get into the pushup position, and instead of going slow, drop down and explode back up as fast as you can. The momentum will push you right away from the surface of the ground, giving you time to clap your hands.



For an explosive pushup,
nothing beats the good old
clapping pushup. In

TRAINING IDEAS

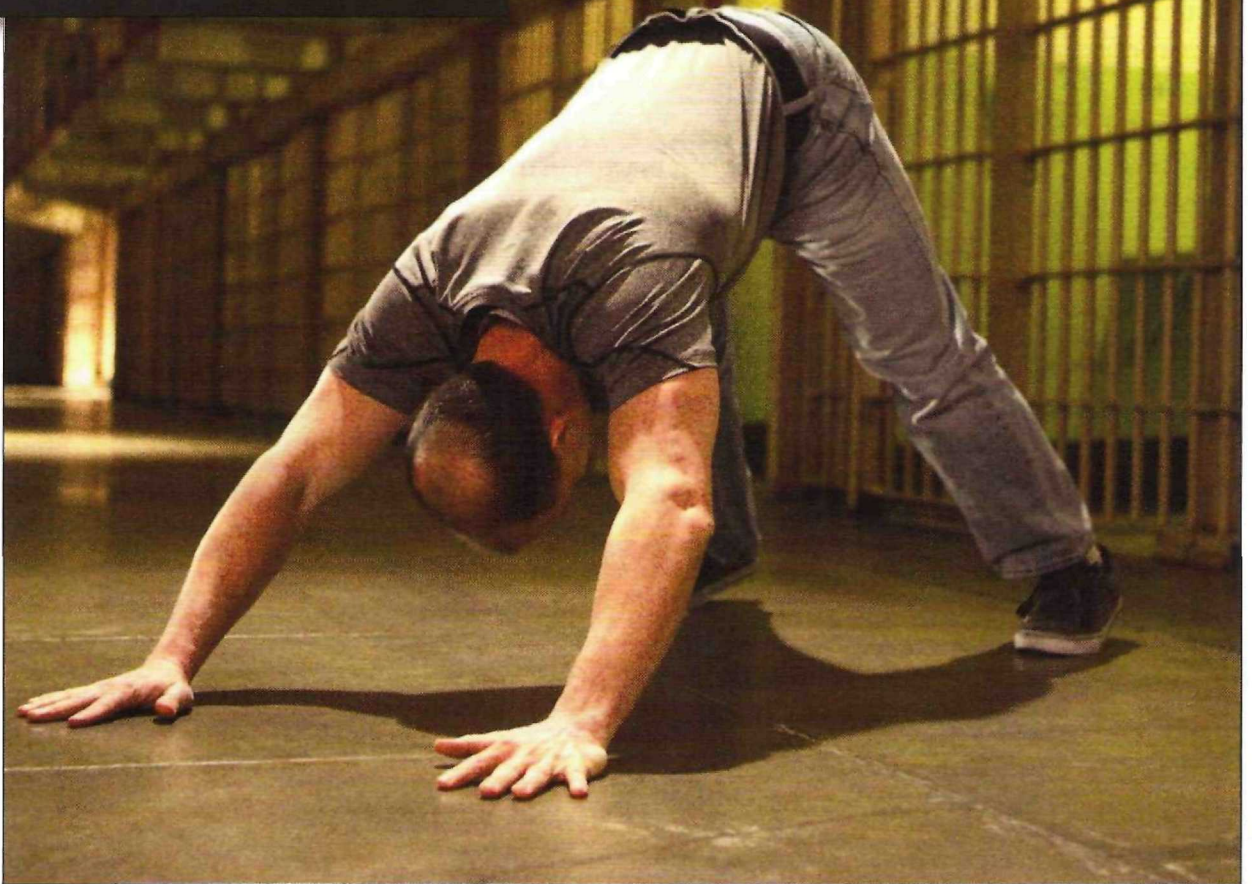
Once you're comfortable with regular-speed pushups, ideally uneven pushups, you can start throwing this exercise into your routine, to develop some speed and turn your strength into power. It's always good to build some joint strength with regular, smooth reps before you play around with any more explosive, power-based exercises. When you begin to include them into your routine, always start slowly to give your soft tissues a chance to adapt. One great way to start slow is by trying the exercise on your knees before going to straight legs. Keep the reps low and go for quality over quantity. Some guys develop so much power that they can clap two or even three times. This is a great variant for martial artists or athletes who require strength and speed in their upper body.

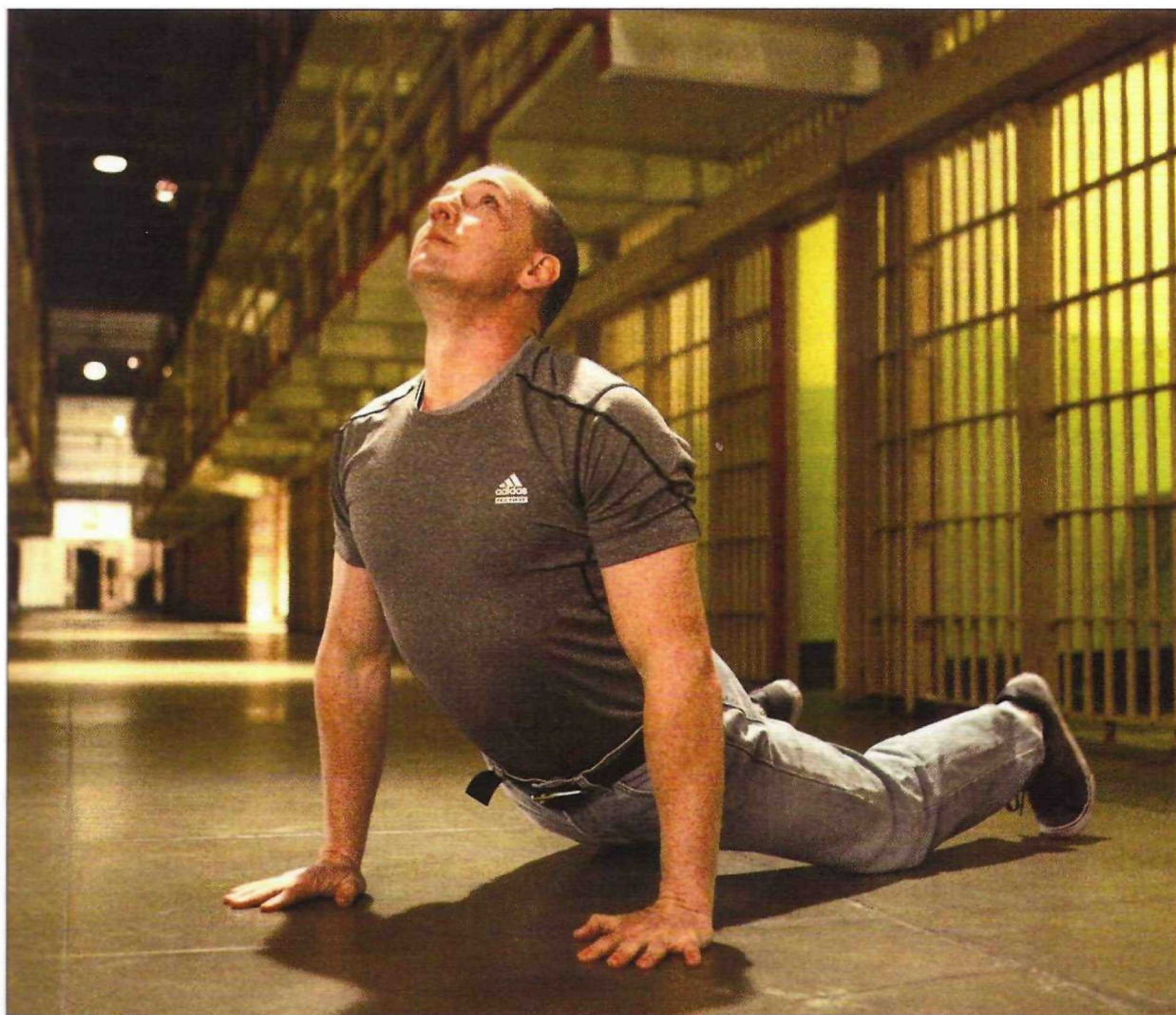
DIVEBOMBER PUSHUPS

OVERVIEW

Divebomber pushups are a great variant often used by the military. They combine strength, control, as well as flexibility; a great combo for any exercise. Start in the pushup position but with your feet wide. Bend your arms and dip your head as if you were diving under an imaginary wire. Then push your arms straight, while keeping your hips close to the floor. From there, you reverse the movement—bending your arms and going back under the wire a second time to the starting position. Don't forget to go back under the wire; if you keep your arms straight and just push your butt back to the starting position, you're not doing a divebomber pushup—you're doing a Hindu pushup.

Divebomber pushups are a great variant often used by the military.





TRAINING IDEAS

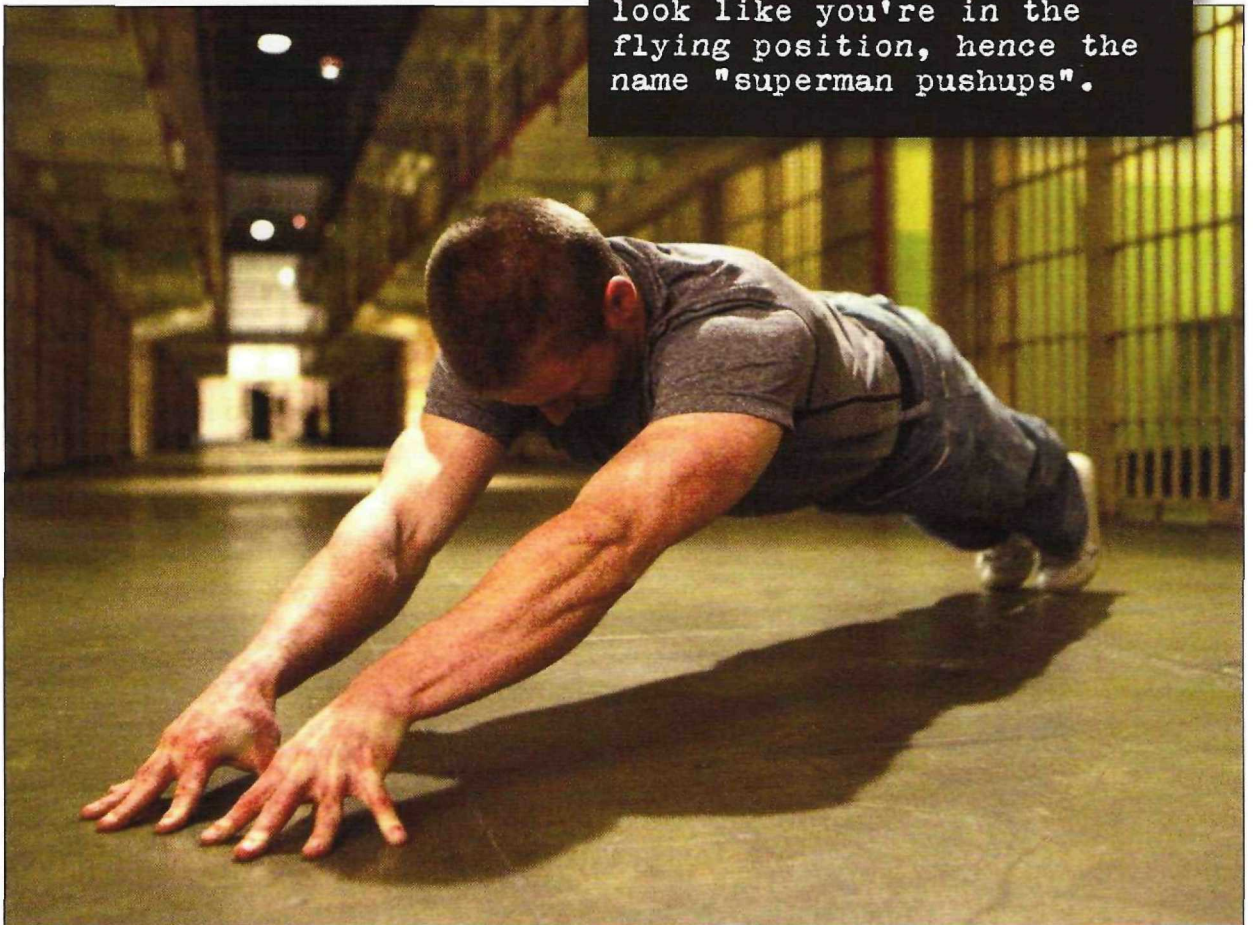
Divebomber pushups aren't really harder than regular pushups, but they do involve the entire body. You can train them anytime in your workout, but it's tough to be progressive beyond just improving form or adding reps. Because of this, they work well as a finishing movement at the end of a regular pushup workout.

SUPERMAN PUSHUPS

OVERVIEW

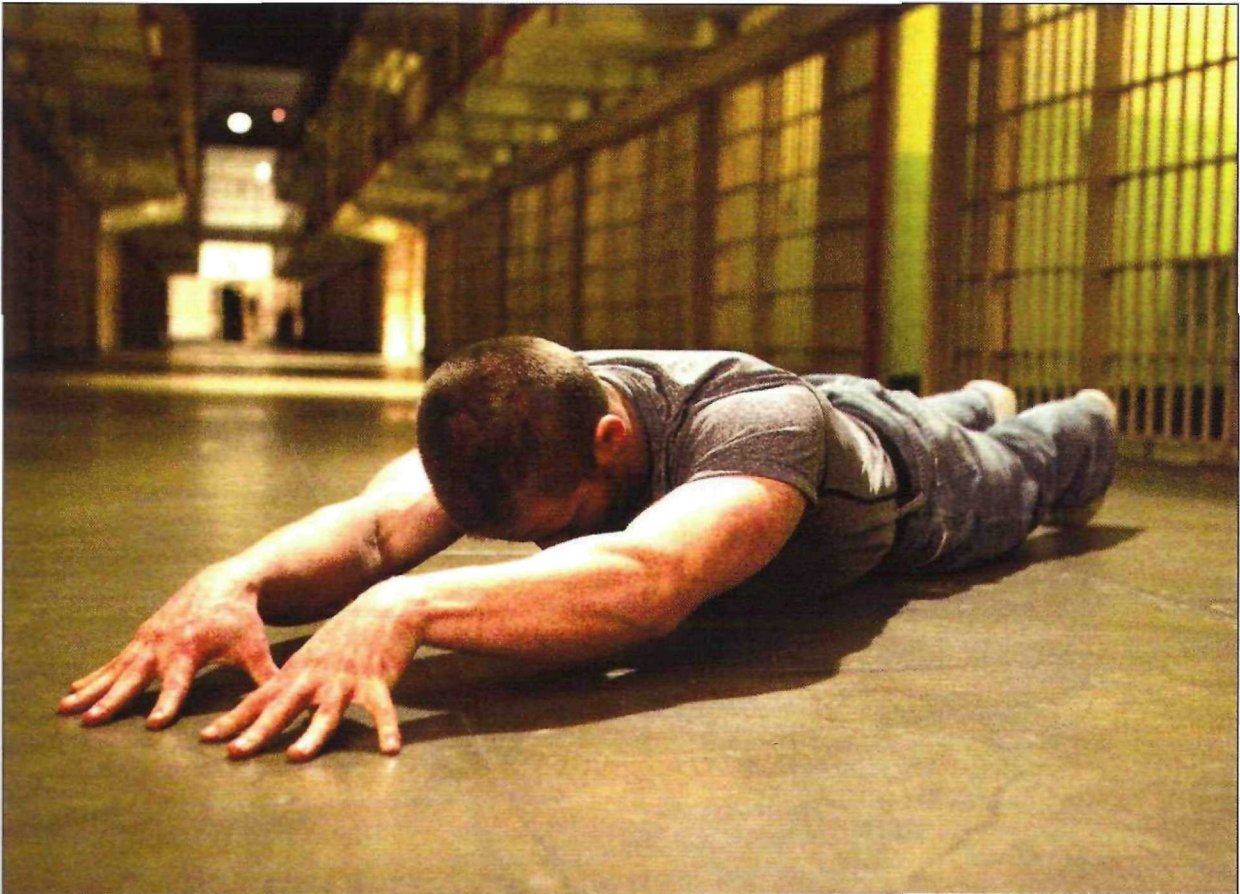
Superman pushups are a very challenging variation of the basic pushup. Essentially, you're doing pushups with your feet wide and your arms way out in front of you, instead of below your shoulders. With your arms out, you look like you're in the flying position, hence the name "superman pushups". This version was made popular by the great Jack LaLanne way back in the fifties. But no matter when they were popular, the fact remains that they require an unusual amount of power. They even look difficult.

With your arms out, you look like you're in the flying position, hence the name "superman pushups".



TRAINING IDEAS

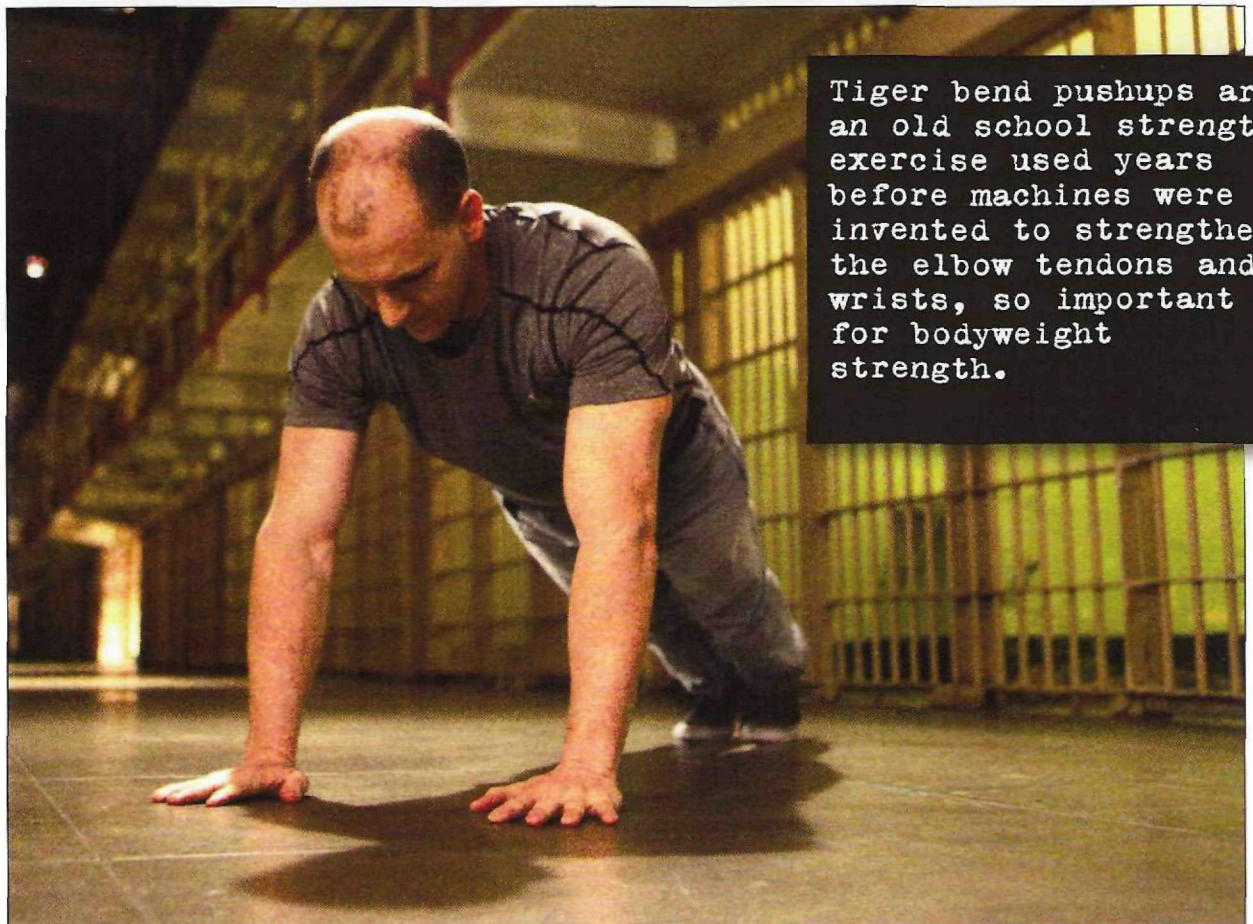
Although this exercise is technically a pushup, it is a distant cousin to the family. Because you barely bend your arms, the triceps get an isometric, or static workout, and the lats get more work than the chest. But any straight arm exercise multiplies your bodyweight, so this is an impressive feat of strength to add to your skill set if you can. If they're too tough, you can begin with your arms bent then slowly straighten them as you become stronger. Jack LaLanne got so strong doing this exercise, that he could do it with just one arm; an achievement very few athletes have ever been able to replicate. Work hard and combine this exercise with lots of work on the ten steps, and you might become one of the few who can equal the legendary Jack.



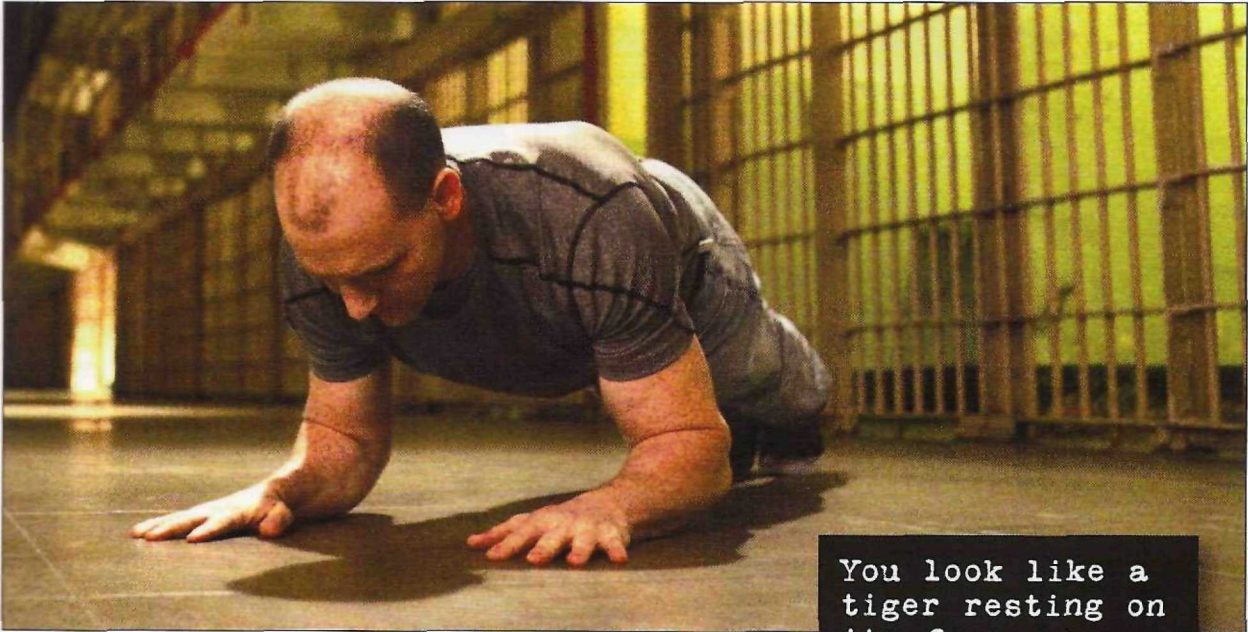
TIGER BEND PUSHUPS

OVERVIEW

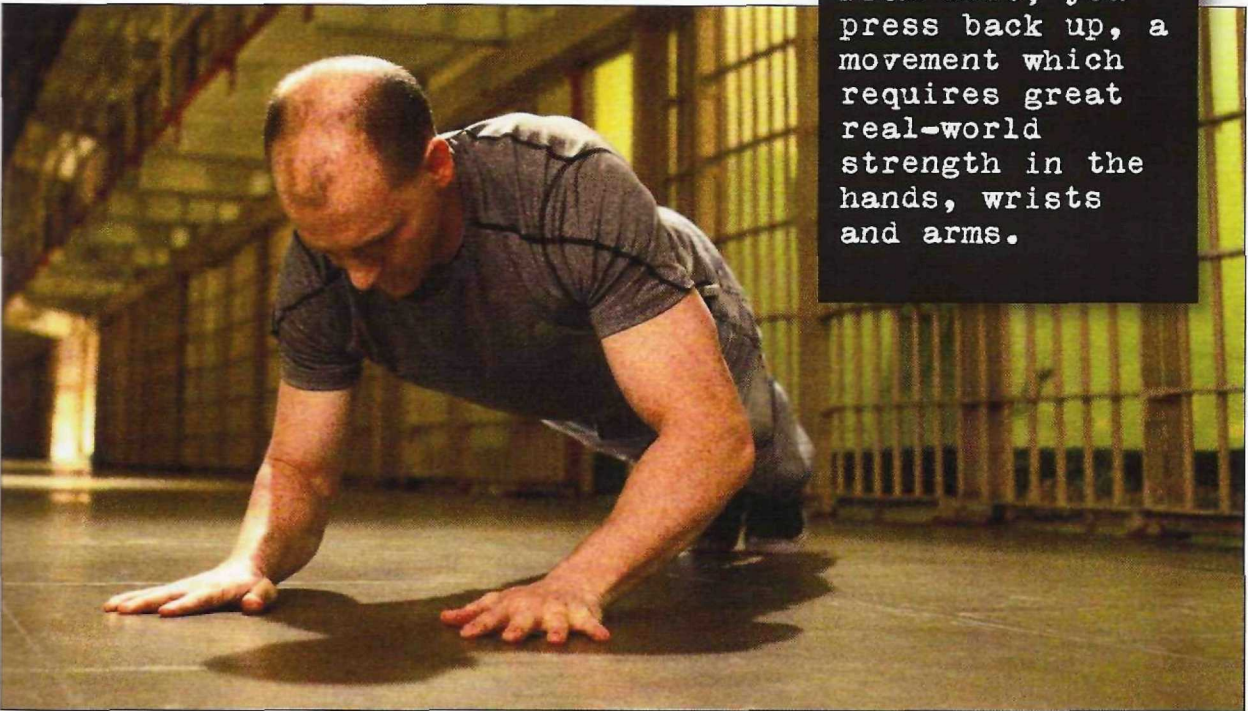
Tiger bend pushups are an old school strength exercise used years before machines were invented to strengthen the elbow tendons and wrists, so important for bodyweight strength. The tiger bend pushup is named that way because instead of lowering your chest towards the ground, you lower your forearms flat on the floor. You look like a tiger resting on its forepaws. From here, you press back up, a movement which requires great real-world strength in the hands, wrists and arms. This is an exercise that can be picked up by anyone who puts in the effort and builds up slowly.



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TRAINING IDEAS

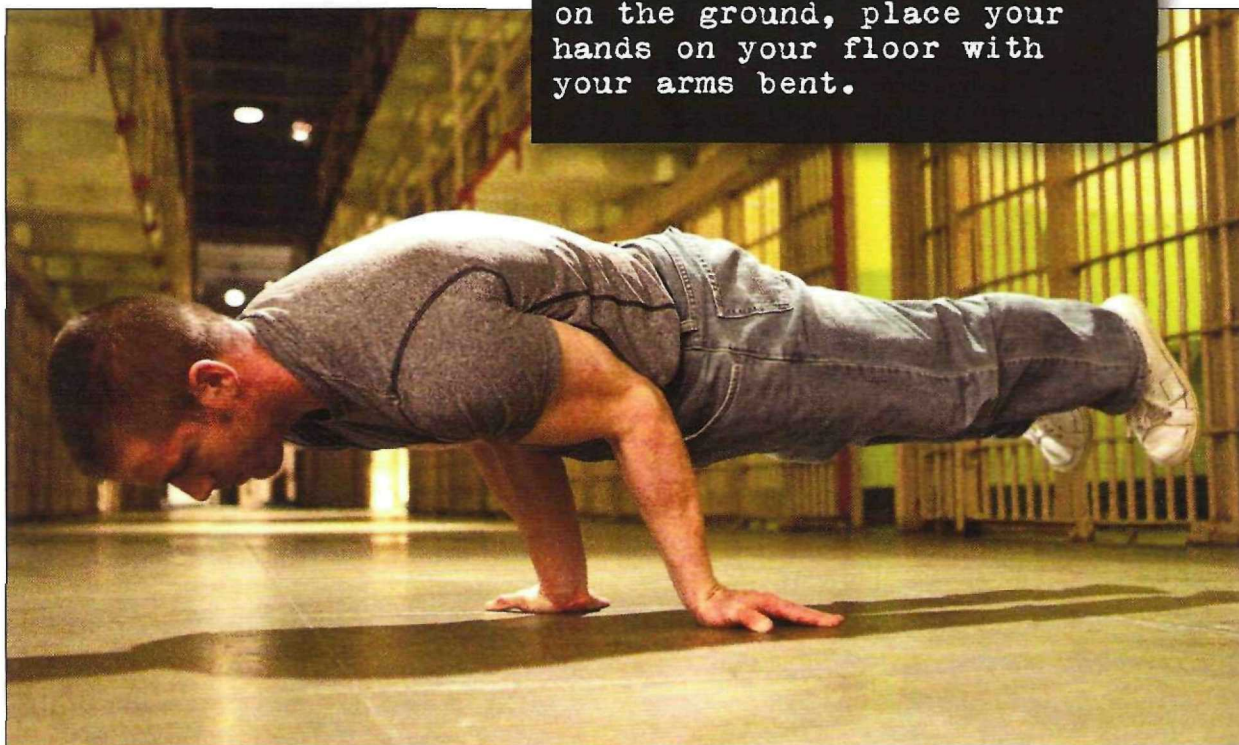
You don't see this exercise used much anymore, and it's a shame because it's an amazing feat of strength and skill which will help anyone build incredible strength in the elbows, triceps and forearm complex. If you commit a lot of time to tiger bend movements, you'll notice far less elbow and forearm strain during your training. If you get to the point where twenty of these pushups are easy, you can explore doing tiger bends in the handstand position. Tiger bend handstand pushups are featured in the sixth disc of this series, *Beyond Power: The One-arm Handstand Pushup Series*.

ELBOW LEVER

OVERVIEW

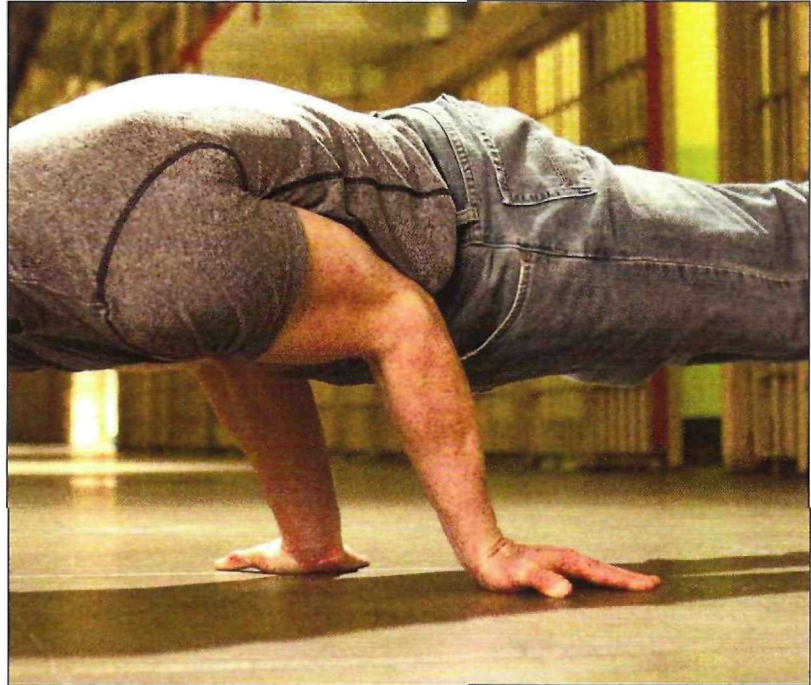
One static exercise which works similar muscles to the pushup is the elbow lever. This is a very traditional bodyweight hold which requires great arm and shoulder strength, as well as good core and lower back strength to hold your body ramrod straight without support. This exercise can be considered a variant of the pushup, because your body is in a similar position, but your elbows are anchored into your torso and your legs are straight out behind you in mid-air. To try this hold, just get on the ground, place your hands on your floor with your arms bent. Rest your ribs on your elbows as a kind of pivot, and lean forwards as you straighten your legs out behind you. In some prisons it's called the "plank", although this usually refers to the straight arm version on the outside.

To try this hold, just get on the ground, place your hands on your floor with your arms bent.



TRAINING IDEAS

Some of this exercise is balance, some is strength. It makes for an interesting trick which is fairly easy to learn when you have become quite strong in your pushups. If you find the elbow lever quite easy on the floor, you can try it with your hands on a raised platform, like two arms of a chair. This requires greater control, and therefore greater strength. There are even harder versions you can explore, such as the planche, which is like an elbow lever but with straight arms, but this requires as much great balance as great strength and belongs more to the realm of gymnastics than pure bodyweight strength training.





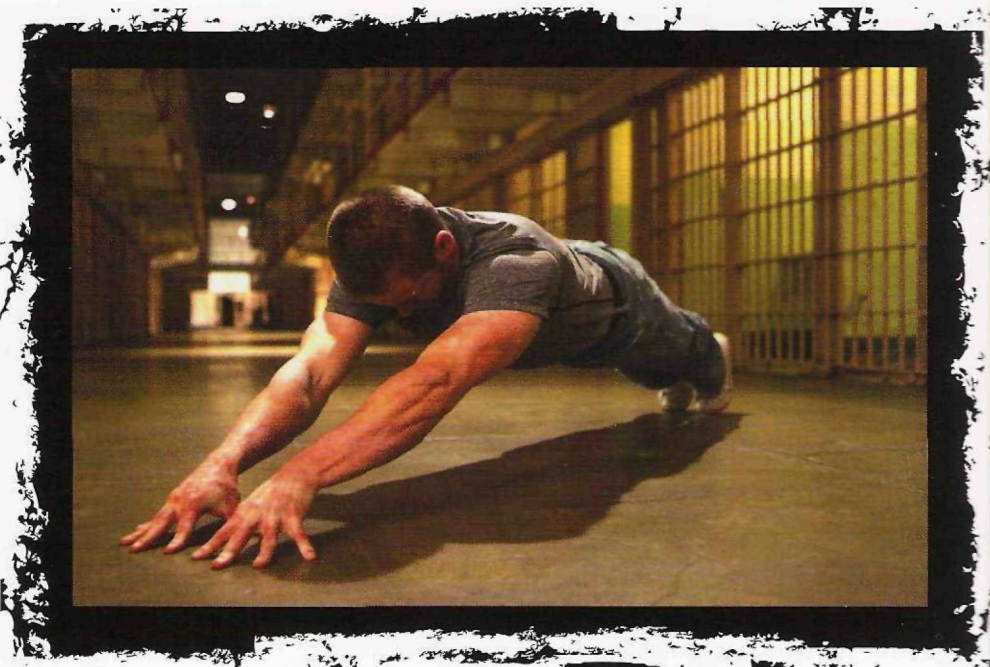


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