

BJJ Strength and Conditioning

The Top 6 Exercises

by Ben Zhuang with Stephan Kesting

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Many jiu-jitsu students want to know what the best strength training exercises are for BJJ. They want to focus on the exercises that give the best results fastest.

To help answer this question I met up with my friend Ben Zhuang who is a strength and conditioning coach, personal trainer, nutritionist and BJJ black belt.

Ben has also been a guest on my podcast – [click here to listen to that interview.](#)

In this PDF Ben will show you 6 of the top strength training exercises for our sport. For each of these exercises you'll get a link to a how-to video on Youtube, pictures showing you the key points, a step-by-step breakdown and more.

1. **The Hip Thrust** (youtu.be/nzH7DTgsZAo)
2. **Alternating Base Rows** (youtu.be/Qmw9TKnQ9NY)
3. **The Modified Split Squat** (youtu.be/DfGu48vMmlU)
4. **The B Stance Squat** (youtu.be/5uFUvFXhp7U)
5. **The Half Turkish Getup with Kettlebell** (youtu.be/UVpNvu0w1z4)
6. **The Dead Bug Core Exercise** (youtube.com/watch?v=M14fmjvDXMo)



Exercise 1: The Hip Thrust (youtu.be/nzH7DTgsZAo)



The hip thrust is the one of the best exercises for sports performance. This movement is essentially a bridge which has many applications in BJJ including pin escapes, armbar applications, chokes, guard passes, sweeps, takedowns, etc.

You need to be able to lift the weight off your hips whenever you're doing a bridge, so you might as well get good at it in the gym first! Watch the video of how to do the Hip Thrust (and 8 variations) at youtu.be/nzH7DTgsZAo

How to do the Basic Hip Thrust



If you have a device called the 'hip thruster' like we do for these pictures then definitely use that. But if you don't then you can do the exercise with your back on a bench or on a padded plyometrics box.

Ideally the height should be 12 – 16 inches depending on your own height.

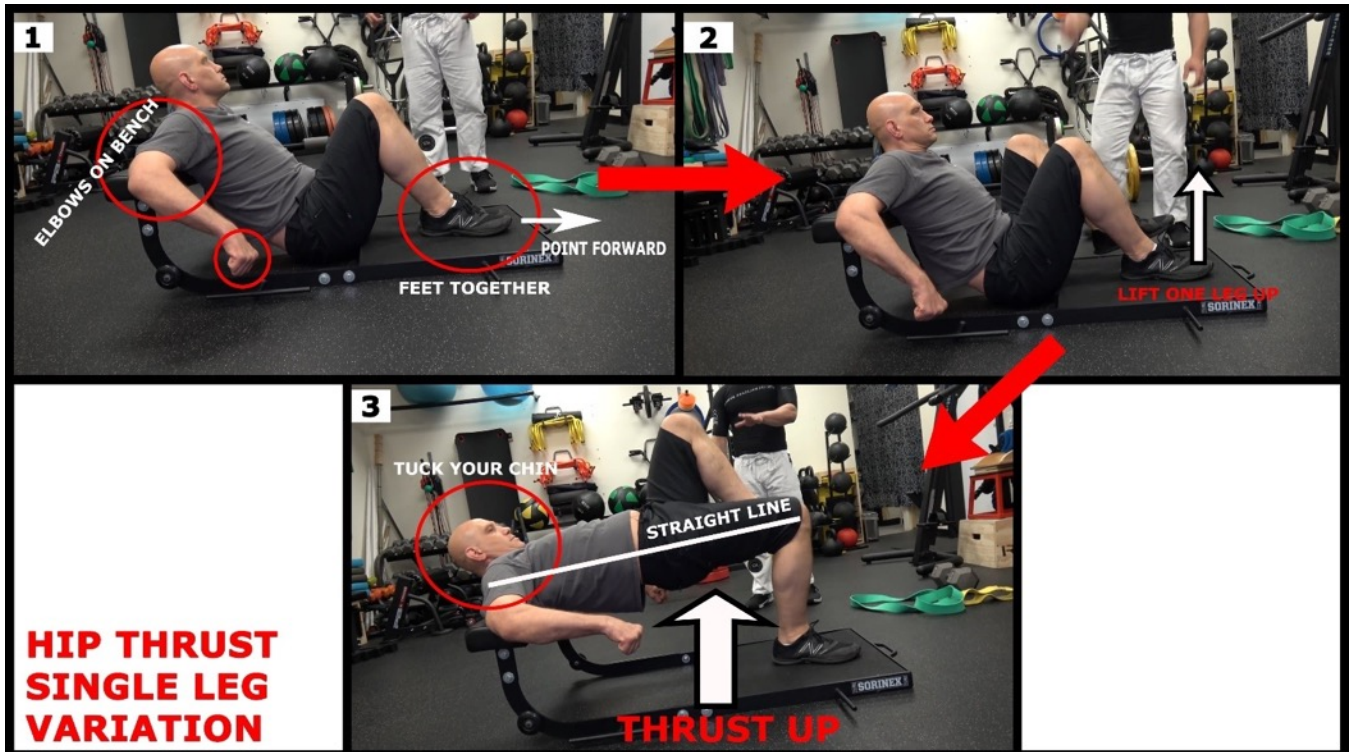
Step 1: Sit on the floor with feet on the ground about hip width and pointing straight.

Step 2: Have your upper back leaning on the bench. Rest your elbows along the sides of the bench with your fists clenched.

Step 3: Tuck your chin.

Step 4: Thrust up and squeeze your glutes at the top. Your spine should be a straight line from your knees to your shoulders. Don't have a curved spine like at the bottom of the picture above!

Single-leg Hip Thrust Variation



If using both legs and no weight is too easy for you, try this variation. This is also very beneficial in BJJ because a lot of times you're either hooking somebody with a leg or it's stuck, so you end up bridging on just one leg

Step 1: Same starting position as above, except your feet are together, touching, instead of being hip width apart.

Step 2: Bring one leg and one knee up. Keep it floating.

Step 3: Thrust up and squeeze your glutes at the top.

Resistance Band Hip Thrust Variation #1



Once you get the form and posture right, challenge yourself. Use a resistance band around you. You can have it wrapped below or above the knees. By adding this band, it will make the exercise harder by activating the smaller gluteal muscles (gluteus medius & gluteus minimus) by resisting abduction.

Step 1: Set it up the same way as the first exercise. Feet on the ground about hip width and pointing straight. Make sure your feet don't turn in.

Step 2: Wrap the resistance band below or above the knees.

Step 3: Thrust up and squeeze your glutes at the top.

Resistance Band Hip Thrust Variation #2



With this next resistance, you'll get a bigger contraction at the top when you bridge up.

Step 1: Start the same way. Feet on the ground about hip width and pointing straight.

Step 2: Pass a longer resistance band over your waist. If you're using a hip thruster, hook it up on the sides. Otherwise, use heavy kettlebells/ dumbbells to hold it down.

Step 3: Thrust up and squeeze your glutes at the top.

Step 4: Hold the last rep for 5 seconds.

Resistance Band Hip Thrust Variation #3



When you're ready to move forward add the 2 banded variations together. You'll get the resistance of the hip thrust as well as activation of the smaller glute muscles.

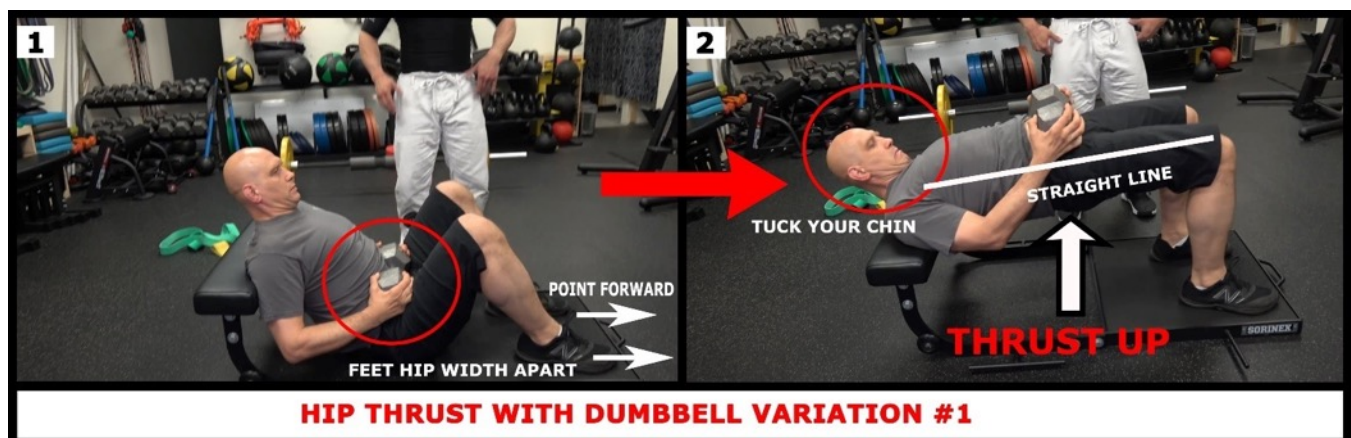
Step 1: Start the same way. Feet on the ground about hip width and pointing straight.

Step 2: Wrap the resistance band below or above the knees.

Step 3: Wrap a longer resistance band over your waist. If you're using a hip thruster, hook it up on the sides. Otherwise, use heavy kettlebells/ dumbbells to hold it down.

Step 4: Thrust up and squeeze your glutes at the top.

Dumbbell Hip Thrust Variation #1



If you can't do 20 reps of the exercise with bodyweight then don't add weights into your workout just yet. Ben recommends using less weight, more reps and an isometric hold at the end. This will be more beneficial and less dangerous.

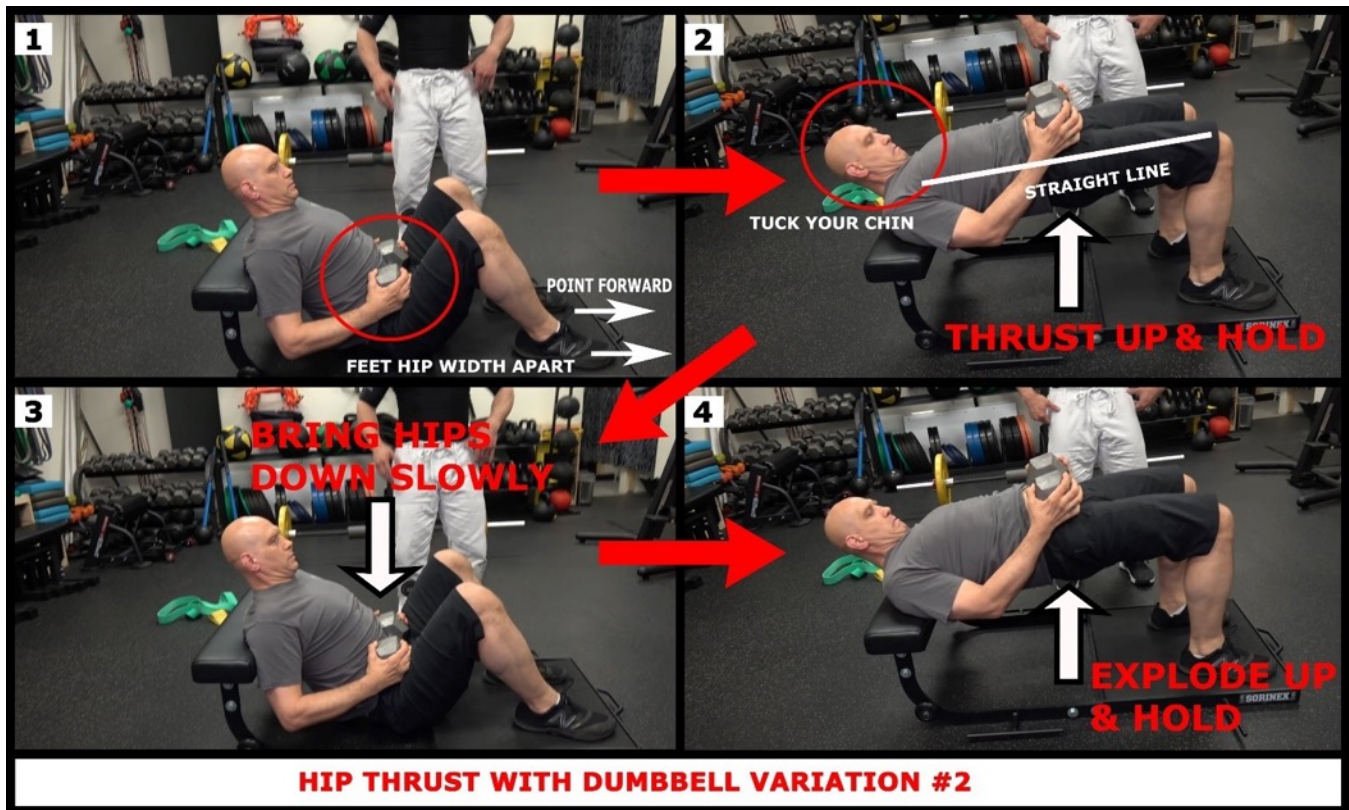
But if you're ready for the added challenge of weight then start with this exercise

Step 1: Same positioning as always, but this time with a dumbbell on your lap..

Step 2: Elbows off the bench so you can support the dumbbell with your hands.

Step 3: Thrust up and squeeze your glutes at the top.

Dumbbell Hip Thrust Variation #2



The next variation mimics more of the sport specific aspect of BJJ. For example, you're bridging somebody up quickly and need to push him overhead. Or you're doing a kipping mount escape that's common in no gi training these days.

Step 1: Same starting position as above, with your elbows off the bench, and your hands holding the dumbbell on your lap.

Step 2: Explode up and squeeze your glutes. Do not overextend.

Step 3: Hold for a second.

Step 4: Bring it down slowly.

Barbell Hip Thrust Variation



Last but not least, the Barbell Hip Thrust...

Step 1: With your legs extended and a padded barbell (a squat sponge, folded towel, etc), roll the barbell up over your legs onto your lap.

Step 2: Bring your legs into position

Step 3: Elbows off the bench and stiff arm the bar, pulling your arm down so your lats can engage. Keep your shoulder blades down and don't shrug.

Step 4: Thrust up and squeeze your glutes at the top.

Step 5: Hold the last rep for 10 seconds.

Exercise 2: Alternating Base Row (youtu.be/Qmw9TKnQ9NY)

The Alternating Base Row is not an exercise that everyone can do right away. You need to develop a good hip hinge and be able to row from a bench properly. You'll get to work on your lats and back but this exercise is mainly for building a solid base

If you've been training BJJ for awhile this should be a comfortable position because it's similar to passing guard. It will help you in maintain a good posture, pin your opponent's hip and legs, as well as stopping you from getting swept too easily.



How to do Alternating Base Rows

Use kettlebells so you don't need to bend forward as much as if you were using dumbbells. Do 4 or 5 sets of 20 repetitions.

Step 1: Have your feet pointing straight forward and far apart, outside the kettlebells for safety (so you don't plant it on your foot). Keep your elbows in and flat back.

Step 2: Push in with one and pull the other directly into your hip. You have to push in the other weight in order to generate force to row. The more you generate force into the ground, the more explosively you can lift the kettle bell.

Exercise 3: The Modified Split Squat (youtu.be/DfGu48vMmlU)

The Modified Split Squat mimics your posture during a takedown, reinforcing the range of motion used for penetration shots. It's a glute dominant exercised compared to the usual split squat/lunge with is no curvature in the back, making it a relatively safe exercise.



How to Do the Modified Split Squat

Step 1: Step back into a reverse lunge posture.

Step 2: Shift your torso forward so that your chest and shoulder line is closer to your knee. Keep your back neutral.

Step 3: Make a fist and create tension to help keep your balance.

Step 4: Have your eyes gazing at about 45 degrees angle towards the floor.

Step 5: Lunge while keeping your heel on the ground, then repeat on the other side.

Variation: Add weight when you are comfortable with this exercise. Do this by holding a sandbag in front of your chest or dumbbells in your hands hanging down beside your legs.

Exercise 4: The 'B Stance' Squat (youtu.be/5uFUvFXhp7U)

The B Stance Squat puts you in a position similar to a low wrestling stance and a modified 'combat base' posture for passing the guard. If you have the ability to generate the force or keep your posture from this position, you should become a better passer.

The B-Stance squat can be a viable and sports-specific alternative to the Bilateral Squat (i.e the barbell style squat) for those that experience pain doing bilateral exercises or for those looking for more specific transfer to BJJ.



How to do the B Stance Squat

Step 1: Stand with feet hip-width apart. Point both feet straight.

Step 2: Line the toes of your back foot with the heel of your front foot. Keep the heel of your back leg off the ground. Stay on the ball of your foot.

Step 3: Turn and external rotate your hip while keeping your body focusing forward.

Step 4: Keep your elbows in and your back straight.

Step 5: Squat down. Make sure your knees doesn't turn inwards. Your weight should be slightly more on the front foot. Keep your gaze slightly downwards to keep your ribs down, then repeat on the other side.

Variation: B Stance Squat with Weight



B STANCE SQUATS WITH WEIGHTS

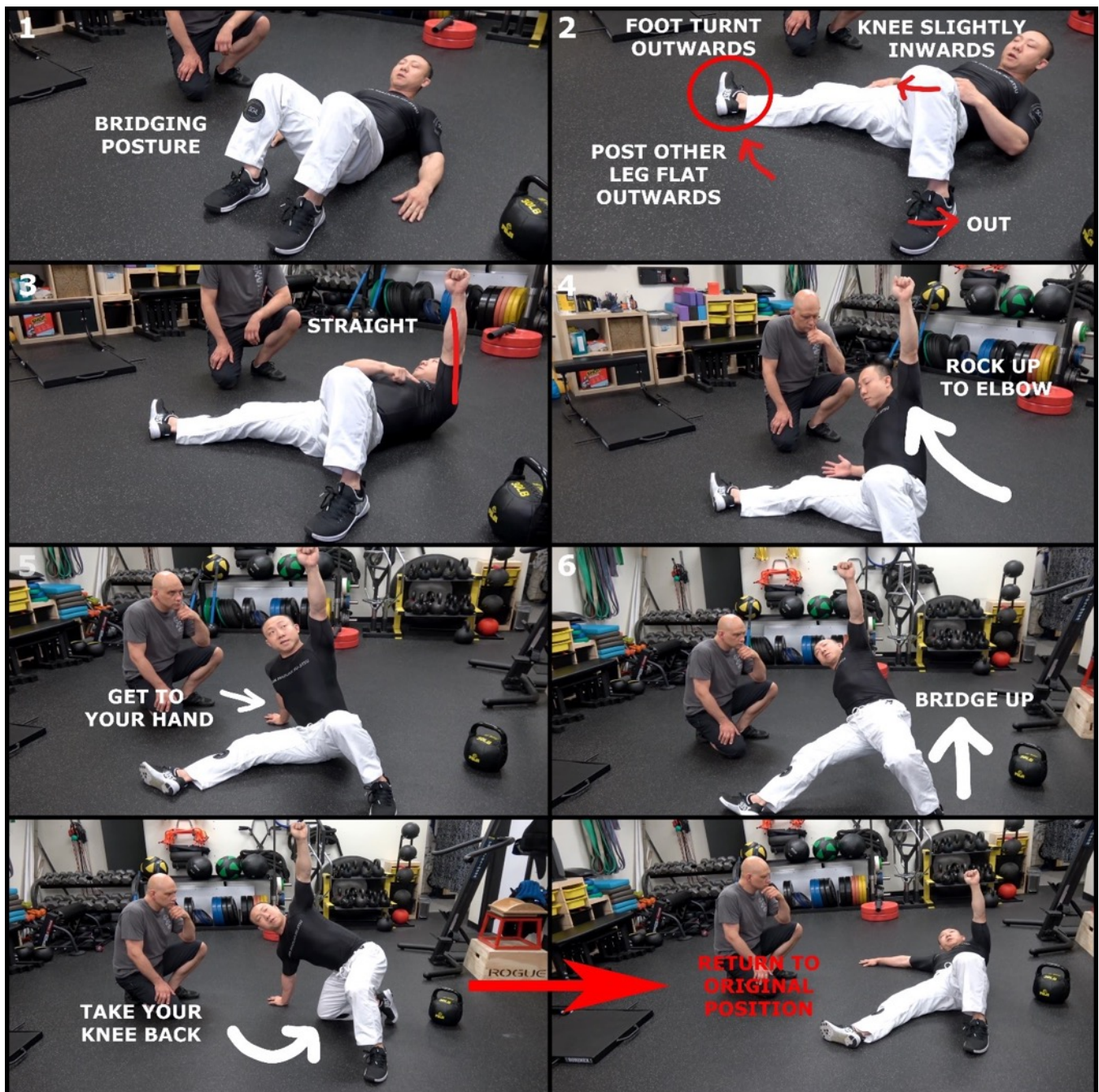
Add weights (sandbag on the chest, kettlebell in the goblet position, etc) when you're comfortable with this exercise.

Exercise 5: The Half Turkish Getup with Kettlebell

(youtu.be/UVpNvu0w1z4)

The Half Turkish Getup is basically the first half of the Turkish Getup. This exercise will teach you in creating frames off the ground.

You'll get the benefits from doing only the first half of the exercise because you usually don't get to the standing position when doing BJJ, making the second half of the Turkish Getup less necessary.



Best BJJ Strength Training Exercises 5: The Half Turkish Getup with Kettlebell

How to do the Half Turkish Getup

This exercise is similar similar to the technical standup motion in BJJ.

Step 1: Start with the posture you would use if you were about to bridge out of mount.

Step 2: Take one of your legs out and turn that knee in slightly so the force when you sit up will go in the direction you want it to go.

Step 3: Take the other leg out and post it flat outwards. Turn the foot out. This position lets you sit up with your hips facing the direction that you want.

Step 4: Hold one arm up straight with the weight. The weight should be outside of your hand.

Step 5: Use your hand and rock up to your elbow.

Step 6: With your elbow, get to your hand.

Step 7: Bridge up. Keep looking at your weight.

Step 8: Take your knee back.

Step 9: Go back to your original position.

Repeat with the other side.



IMPORTANT TIP FOR HOLDING THE WEIGHT: Rock over from the fetal position and use your body to get to the position you want.

Exercise 6: The Dead Bug Core Exercise ([youtube.com/watch?v=M14fmjvDXMo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M14fmjvDXMo))

The Dead Bug Core exercise teaches you to connect your core to your lower body. For Ben, this exercise could be the most important exercise to develop the guard in BJJ because it teaches you how to be in a powerful position on your back.

For example, if you're playing guard with your head back on the ground then your rib cage flares up and your spine curves, which will kill the power in your movements. However if you tuck your chin in, have your lower back on the mat, and activate your core (as you do in this exercise) you will notice instantly that your movements are a lot stronger.



Best BJJ Strength Training Exercises 6: The 'Dead Bug' Core Exercise

How to do the Basic Dead Bug Core Exercise



Lie on the ground with your legs up 90 degrees and feet flexed.

Step 1: Ensure there's no gap below your lower back.

Step 2: Hold your neck up. Use a pillow if it gets too uncomfortable. You want to be able to hold it up on your own eventually.

Step 3: Keep your core tight.

Step 4: Alternate the heel to the ground.

Dead Bug with Arm Movement Variation



Use your arms to synchronise with the movements to make the exercise a little easier.

Step 1: Set it up the same way.

Step 2: Put your hands up straight towards the ceiling.

Step 3: As you touch one heel to the ground, move the opposite arm backwards.

Step 4: Repeat on the other side.

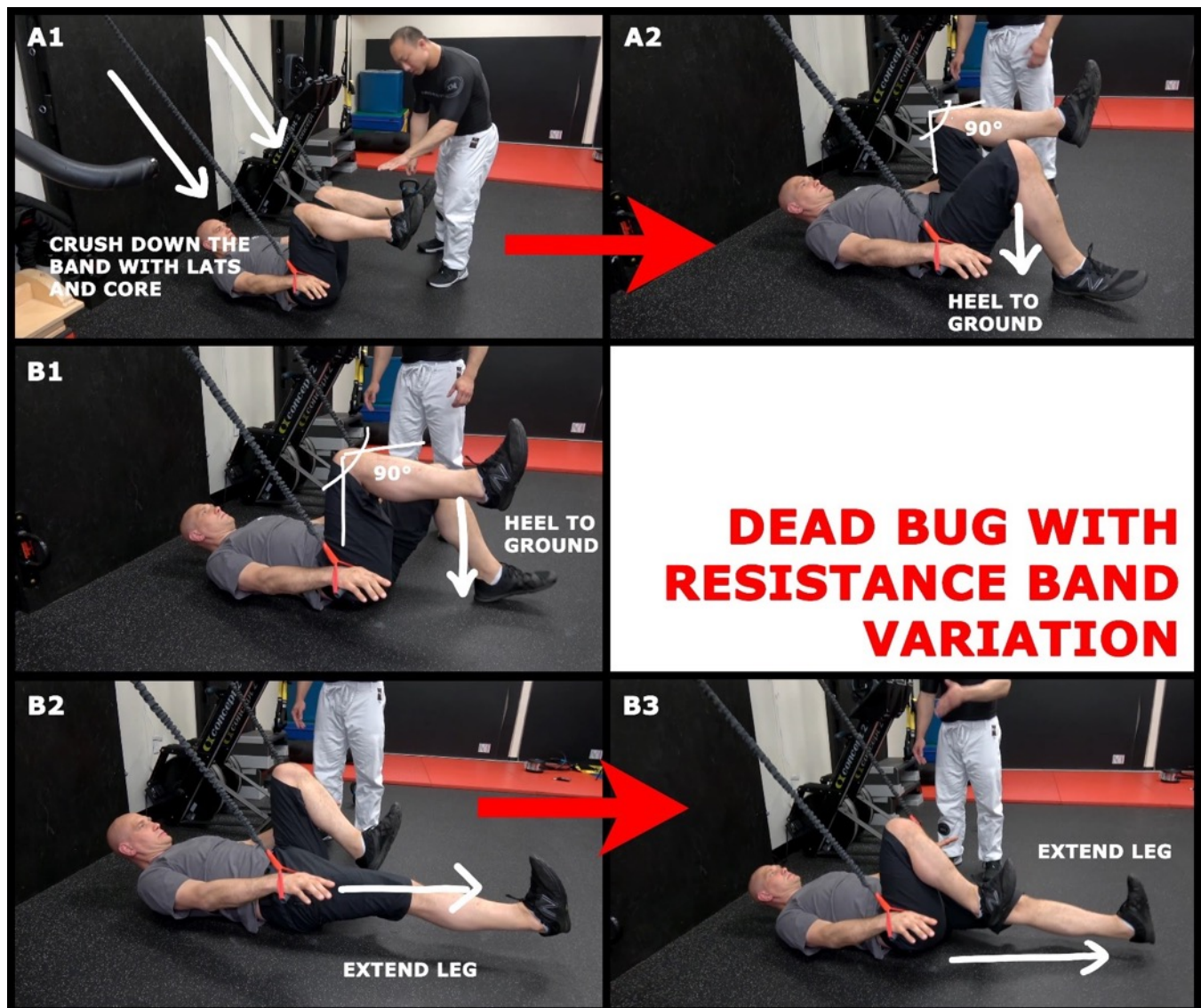
Single-leg Extended Dead Bug Variation



Extending a leg out straight makes it more challenging. The better you get in this exercise then the lower you can get your extended leg to the ground.

Set it up the same way, then alternate extending one leg at a time.

Dead Bug with Resistance Band Variation



Step 1: Set up the same way except have two resistance bands coming down to your hands at rough a 45 degree angle.

Step 2: Crush down the band using your lats and core and keep your chin tucked.

Step 3: Extend alternating legs while keeping your lower back flat on the floor.

More Ben: Follow Ben Zhuang on Instagram as @coachbz or by clicking www.instagram.com/coachbz/

More Stephan: Follow Stephan Kesting on Instagram as @stephan_kesting or by clicking here: www.instagram.com/stephan_kesting/. Also check out his extensive website at graplearts.com and his podcast called [The Strenuous Life Podcast](#)