



RING TRAINING

ABSTRACT

Would adding rings to your clients' exercise programs improve overall physical fitness outcomes? If so, specifically what would the benefits be?

Traditionally, rings have been claimed exclusively by the sport of gymnastics. Strength and agility movements on the rings, such as the incredible iron cross hold, where the body is held vertical on horizontal arms, were only practiced and performed by elite gymnasts. The focus when using the rings has always been attaining the highest score.

In this paper, we will look at whether the use of rings should extend outside of the sport of gymnastics and should be used to improve the outcomes of a more general workout program.

Research study results indicate ring training increases upper body strength as well as core strength. This method of training allows for varying levels of exercises depending on your client's ability while still increasing overall strength and conditioning.

After reading this paper you will:

- Know a brief history of the rings
- Understand why it is good to incorporate rings into an exercise program
- Realise the specific benefits of increased upper body and core strength
- Learn how to get your clients started with basic ring exercises, as well as more advanced exercises

RING TRAINING

THE HISTORY OF RINGS

The rings consist of two small circles that are suspended by straps from an overhead support. Rings are generally made of wood, metal or plastic. Competition rings are usually made of wood as they are easier to grip, tend to feel sturdier and are of higher quality. Male gymnasts grasp the rings and perform different exercises that require the highest levels of upper body strength. Gymnasts refer to the rings as the still rings as their goal is to keep the rings as still as possible during their routine.

In the early nineteenth century, Friedrich Jahn of Germany invented the rings and other modern gymnastics equipment. Jahn was an advocate of physical education and known as the “father of gymnastics”. He established a steady following among both youths and adults when he opened his first gymnastics club in 1811. The rings have been part of the Olympic Games gymnastics program since they were modernised in 1896. In the 1948 Olympics held in London, women competed on the rings as well as men but since then it has become a male-only discipline.

RINGS IN GENERAL TRAINING

Rings are the original type of suspension training – a form of exercise and physical conditioning where a user works against the weight of their body by use of grips that dangle from a respective strap extending from a wall, ceiling, or other nearby structure. Suspension training has been known for many years and was initially performed using typical gymnastics rings (Hinds, Polinsky, Rollins, & Dorsey, 2017).

The military began incorporating suspension training in the 1990s. It has since been adapted for use by the general public and use of gymnastics rings has been gradually trickling over to mainstream workouts (Harris, Bjork, Brewer, & Ortiz, 2015).



BENEFITS OF RING TRAINING

Using the rings for workouts reduces stress on the joints caused from repetitive weight lifting, reverses injuries caused by over dependence of exercise machines, and is a safe choice for pushing physical capabilities (Gillette, 2015).

Suspension training has been shown to increase the level of muscle activation when performing exercises such as push-ups, inverted row, bilateral bridge, and prone plank – compared to doing the same exercises on a stable surface (Harris et al, 2017). Suspension training caused an increase in muscle activation for nearly all muscle groups tested, which included the pectoralis, rectus abdominis, obliques, rhomboids, and erector spinae muscles. The inverted row also showed a compelling increase in muscle activation to the deltoid, obliques, and rectus abdominis muscles.

It has been shown that strength in the back and trunk flexion muscles can be improved by using suspension training compared to traditional training. Suspension training was also demonstrated to improve explosive power of the trunk extension and flexion muscles [Ma et al, 2017]

There is evidence of stimulation of growth hormone production from even a single suspension training workout [Dudgeon et al, 2011]. This supports the use of suspension training as an alternative to traditional resistance training for stimulating the anabolic hormones that support muscle growth and recovery.

The research provides supporting evidence that incorporating rings into a workout program can be very beneficial. Ring work can help improve your overall strength, functional stability, and athletic performance. Gymnastics rings can be a beneficial training apparatus used to build upper body and core strength.

RING WORK CAN HELP IMPROVE YOUR OVERALL STRENGTH, FUNCTIONAL STABILITY, AND ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE.

BASIC RING EXERCISES

If you challenge your clients to continue past the basics of body weight exercises, ring training can help them build more strength while increasing shoulder stability. Simply hanging upside down on the rings requires balance and will be difficult for those unfamiliar with being inverted. To help avoid injuries and maximise the benefits of using rings, it is important to follow a gradual progression of exercises.

RING ROWS

First, have your clients adjust the rings to just below shoulder height and shoulder-width apart. They will then grab the rings and lean back while keeping their body straight and arms fully extended.



While maintaining a tight body, have them pull themselves up to the rings. They should think about the rings touching their chest as they pull up.



Have them lower their body back down to the starting position to complete the movement.

Starting in a more upright position makes the movement easier. To make this more challenging, your client can walk their legs farther out in front of them so their body is more parallel to the ground. Lowering the rings is another way to increase the difficulty.



SUPPORT POSITION

Many of the more advanced ring exercises start from the support position where the athlete holds themselves above the rings with vertical arms. For novices, it is a great exercise in itself.



The client should jump into this top position and actively push down on the rings. They should pull the rings in towards their body and lock out their elbows. The rings will naturally want to pull away from them; they will need to fight to keep them close. Slightly externally rotating the arms will help with the lockout at the top and keep the chest from dropping. Instruct them to keep their eyes forward and head neutral.

Their whole body should remain straight and tight, with their feet and legs pressed together. Remember the rings are stable – any instability is caused by the client's movement.

RING DIPS

Once a good support position has been achieved, the first movement to introduce based on it is the ring dip, which starts and ends in the support position. This is a fantastic exercise for triceps development but also works a range of other muscles around the arms, shoulders and core.



The client should bend their elbows and lower their body down so their shoulders are below their elbows. Their hands should be almost touching their armpits in the bottom position. Then they should push their body back up from the dip and finish where they started in the locked-out support position. Dropping as low as possible in the ring dip is important because it is how the strength required for a muscle-up is developed.

ADVANCED RING EXERCISES

One of the great things about the rings is that once an exercise has been mastered, there is always a more difficult one to attempt next. We won't be able to cover even a small fraction of the possibilities here but we will look at one movement that is seen by many as a big milestone in the path to developing great upper body strength – the muscle-up.

Other advanced movements on the rings include front and back levers, press to handstand, and the iron cross.

STRICT MUSCLE-UP

The muscle-up is a difficult movement that requires unmatched upper body strength. It can take you from below the rings to above the rings in one swift movement. It can be challenging to train, but fun to learn at the same time. The version we are looking at here is called strict because we don't use momentum from our lower body to achieve it.

The muscle-up is basically a pull-up into a transition above the rings, followed by a ring dip. See image to the right.

The movement begins below the rings in a false grip. The false grip enables you to go from below the rings to above the rings with no change in your hands (grip). The false grip is essential in order to be successful in the transition above the rings. To do a false grip, place your wrist on the rings just below your hands, then fold your hand over and grab the ring. Your thumb is still wrapped around the inside of the ring. Be aware that this is not a comfortable position.



Next, pull the rings down low to your sternum. This is the pull-up part. Keep your elbows in tight and maintain the false grip. Pull the rings down as far as possible. Lower the rings and practice from the ground. Use your legs to help pull you up.

Immediately following the pull-up is the transition. This is the turnover from below the rings to above the rings. Drive your shoulders over the rings into the dip position. This is a fast and dynamic movement! Keep the rings close to your body. Get above and in front of the rings. Again, this is best practiced from the ground making sure to hit the correct positions before and after the transition turnover.

The final step is pressing up to the support position from the dip. This is what makes the ring dip a prerequisite for the muscle up. Practice going low on those dips, so you are comfortable in the bottom position.



THE MUSCLE-UP IS BASICALLY A PULL-UP INTO A TRANSITION ABOVE THE RINGS, FOLLOWED BY A RING DIP.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Incorporating rings into a client's training program can be very challenging and humbling when first introduced. Establishing a solid support position is a requirement before progressing into ring dips and muscle-ups.

Coaches will most likely encounter their clients struggling to even hold this support position for more than second. Try having your clients lower the rings to below waist level so they can step into the rings instead of jumping into the support position.

A very common fault is trying to hold the support position with arms bent. The arms must be straight. Keep it simple and encourage them to continue to practice every week.

SUMMARY

In this paper we have looked at why ring training is valuable and some basic exercises that even beginners can start to practice on the rings.

Ring training can be useful for everyone regardless of skill level. It has been shown to simultaneously build strength and stability. Case studies support the use of rings outside of their traditional role in gymnastics.

Remember clients will need support in getting started and will need to recognise that the difficulty level will increase gradually. ■

ESTABLISHING A SOLID SUPPORT POSITION IS A REQUIREMENT BEFORE PROGRESSING INTO RING DIPS AND MUSCLE-UPS.





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