

CLEAR HIP HANDSTAND: SHAPE, DROP, OPEN

By Karen Goeller, CSCS

The **Clear Hip Handstand** on uneven bars is not an easy skill for many gymnasts. It requires technique, timing, speed, and strength. To perform the clear hip to handstand correctly the gymnast must do the following:

1. Form the correct shape in the cast.
2. Keep that shape on the drop and throughout the entire of the skill.
3. Open her shoulders at the correct time, with speed and precision.
4. See the bar, but keep her head neutral.

There are so many drills for the clear hip handstand, but I will discuss my favorite ones.

First, how do you train your gymnast to **hold the shape**? Instruct your gymnast to get in a front support position on the bar. Instruct her to push down on the bar and slide her thighs to the bar just enough to round out her upper back while keeping her buttocks muscles tight. It is imperative that you tell your gymnast to squeeze her buttocks throughout the clear hip to handstand. Once comfortable in the correct shape, rounded upper back and squeezed buttocks, teach the shape to your gymnast upside down. Be sure to remind her that she **MUST** hold the bar securely so that she



does not fall to the floor.

Once in the correct shape on top of the bar instruct your gymnast to drop back until her feet face the ceiling. Her thighs should still be in contact with the bar on the drop. Please spot your gymnast for this

simple **DROP BACK** drill. Make sure she holds the correct shape. The drill is really 1/2 of a back hip circle. Your gymnast will be upside down. Once upside down instruct your gymnast to hold that shape and position for 10–20 seconds. Spot her for this drill to be sure she does not release the bar and fall. As soon as your gymnast loses the correct shape, rounded back with squeezed buttocks, allow her to slowly bring her feet down to the floor and then release the bar. Remind your gymnast to look at the bar the entire time but to keep her head neutral.

The two most important **safety factors** in the clear hip to handstand are to hold onto the bar and to keep the head neutral. Explain to your gymnast that if she drops her head back it will change the shape of her spine. Dropping the head back on this skill may cause your gymnast to lose her grip and fall. Although you want your gymnast to hold the bar securely, you also want her to be able to shift her hands as she circles. You can ask your gymnast to perform a cast and **two consecutive back hip circles** as a wrist flick and shape drill.

Now let's discuss the drop. The better the drop, the easier it will be to reach the handstand. A simple drill for the drop is the **Cast-Drop-Fall** to a resi or soft mat stack. Instruct your gymnast to start in a front support. Ask her to perform a cast. As soon as her hips are off the bar she must release the bar, reach up and back, and land on the mat on her back. Some gymnasts will need a spot the first time. You can hold your gymnast's legs as she casts and guide her down to the mat to land on her back with her arms up. This drill should help your gymnast become comfortable with dropping her shoulders back quickly and remaining in the correct shape.

The next drill also teaches the gymnast to **open her shoulders as she drops back** rather than waiting until she is completely upside down. While teaching the clear hip handstand, tell your gymnast that it is important to open her shoulders as soon as she drops her shoulders back. For the **Cast-Underswing-Drop** instruct your gymnast to perform an underswing and to hold the bar until her toes are facing the ceiling and she

CLEAR HIP HANDSTAND: SHAPE, DROP, OPEN

feels the upward motion. Once your gymnast feels the upward motion she must release the bar and fall to her back on a resi or soft mat stack. When she releases, she must also perform a throwing motion. This drill will help with the drop, shape, and shoulder action for the clear hip handstand. Your gymnast will quickly realize that she must remain tight and drop back quickly in order to travel towards the ceiling for a handstand. You should spot your gymnast until she is comfortable performing this drill on her own.

Here are two strength, visualization, and speed exercises for the clear hip handstand. Your gymnast will need a toning bar and dumbbells. In the beginning, she must perform the exercises slowly. Eventually, she can increase the speed a bit to more closely simulate the clear hip handstand on uneven bars. Start with light weight, 3-pound dumbbells or a 6-pound toning bar, for both exercises.

The **Standing Cast / Front Raise Drill** is very effective with strength, speed, visualization, and technique. It is a useful station between turns on the uneven bars. Tell your gymnast to hold one dumbbell (weight) in each hand. Instruct her to squeeze her buttocks and start with the dumbbells touching her thighs. Your gymnast's palms must face her thighs. Instruct her to raise her arms forward and upward simulating a cast to handstand on uneven bars. Once her hands are facing the ceiling and her shoulders are elevated at the top, she may slowly lower the dumbbells to her thighs.

With both exercises make sure your gymnast keeps her hands shoulder-width apart throughout the exercise. Some gymnasts tend to go too wide with their hands. Instruct your gymnast to keep her arms straight, but if she feels any tension in her elbows, she must perform the drill with slightly bent arms.

The **Supine Kip-Cast Drill** is very effective with strength, speed, visualization, and technique. It is a useful station between turns on the uneven bars. Tell your gymnast to lie on her back on the floor and hold one dumbbell (weight) each hand. Instruct her to start with the dumbbells touching her thighs. Your gymnast's palms must face her thighs. Instruct your gymnast to raise her arms towards the ceiling to simulate

a cast to handstand on bars. She must go through the full range of motion until her hands touch the floor above their head. Once her hands touch the floor, she must elevate her shoulders. That portion of the exercise will help with the cast handstand and clear hip handstand.

Next, instruct your gymnast to lift her hands off the floor and bring her arms towards the ceiling, then down to her thighs. Once the dumbbells touch her thighs, instruct your gymnast to lift her head and shoulders off the floor to form a hollow shape. Her feet must remain on the floor. That part of the exercise will help with the glide kip. When your gymnast performs several repetitions consecutively, she will be performing a similar movement as a glide kip to cast handstand on uneven bars.

You can teach the exercises with dumbbells or with a toning bar, but I prefer dumbbells. With dumbbells, each side of the body will become strong and efficient with the movement. When a toning bar is used, some gymnasts compensate and do more work with their stronger side. That does not allow the weaker side to improve very much.

I hope these drills will help your gymnast become comfortable with the clear hip handstand on uneven bars. You will see that your gymnast's cast handstand will

improve as a result of the two dumbbell exercises. Best of luck with this skill and always keep safety in mind while training. ✖

Karen Goeller, CSCS
Gymnastics and Fitness Author
NSCA-Certified Strength and Conditioning Coach
www.KarenGoeller.com
www.GymnasticsDrills.com