Bodyweight exercises are one of the greatest methods for building strength and definition. You can do them anywhere and they don't require any investment in equipment.
However, you have to know the proper way to train based on your goals.

There are specific ways of training the arms using **bodyweight exercises** to get greater results in less time. The most common exercises... chin ups, pull ups and dips only scratch the surface of bodyweight arm training and create many questions...

For example:

*What if I can’t do these exercises at all? Where do I begin?*

*Do I just keep doing these exercises forever? Shouldn’t I be varying the exercises to provide my muscles with different challenges?*

These are real and valid concerns.

You **DO** need a starting point when training your arms... especially if you can’t do a chin up.

And you **DO** need to have some variety in your exercises in order to stimulate the muscles in different ways.

Training the arms using bodyweight exercises is a world that most people never enter.
They add some push ups and chin ups to the end of their weight lifting routine.

They only get a fraction of the true benefit of bodyweight arm training.

Today, I’m going to teach you everything you need to know about working your shoulders, biceps, triceps, forearms and hands using just your own bodyweight. You’ll learn how to develop strength and increase muscular definition without ever touching a weight.

I’ll give you a variety of bodyweight arm exercises to choose from and show you how to add variety to them, whether you are a beginner or are advanced.

I’ll even show you some workouts that you can follow to get you started today.

Sounds good?

Welcome to the world of bodyweight arm training... one of the most effective ways of training.
WHAT ARE THE MUSCLES IN THE ARM?

Yeah, we’re starting off with the basics here.

I’m not going to get into too many details here. For general purpose, here’s what you need to know:

**Shoulder Muscles (Deltoids)** – Lift up the arm up

**Bicep Muscles** – Flex the elbow

**Tricep Muscles** – Extend the arm

**Forearm/Hand Muscles** – Flex and extend the hand and fingers

Yep, told you we would stay basic.

You can get very detailed in regard to muscle insertion and origins and actions.

Is it necessary? Not really, but it can help if you are working on creating your own arm exercises and are trying target a specific muscle.

**BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES VS WEIGHT LIFTING**

Before I begin, I want to mention that training using just your own bodyweight doesn’t need to be an either/or choice. You CAN add it to your current routine.
But you don’t NEED to... In fact, I just use bodyweight training in my own routine.

It’s a choice.

You have the freedom to decide how you want to train.

**WHY USE JUST BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES?**

There are a ton of benefits for bodyweight training.

- No cost
- Decrease likelihood of injury
- You can do them anywhere
- Help improve core strength
- Decreased boredom
- And many more...

**ISOLATION VS COMPOUND MOVEMENTS**

Typically, when you use weights the exercises are more focused on muscle isolation. For example, with the bicep curl you move a weight upward and are strengthening just the bicep. This is isolation.

The equivalent bodyweight exercise for the bicep, the chin up, works the bicep but also strengthens the forearm, the back muscles and core (among others). In the same amount of time you work more muscles.
How’s that for efficiency? 😊

Let’s take another example, the tricep extension.

When using weights you can do this in a number of ways including: skull crushers, tricep extensions with weight, tricep kickbacks, bench press tricep extensions, etc.

All of these exercises effectively target the triceps muscle.

The equivalent bodyweight triceps exercises, though (as you’ll learn later in this article) also work the core, shoulders, chest muscles and other muscle groups.

So are bodyweight exercises better?

No, they are just different.

Here’s how I look at it...

Weights lifting (especially how most people use them, ie, isolation exercises) are great for targeting one muscle group.

You can really focus on a particular muscle and leave it totally fatigued.

With bodyweight exercises you can target a single muscle group too but other muscle groups will also be worked.

Ok, onward we go.
Can I build as much muscle size in my arms as doing weight lifting?

The short answer is no.

Using progressively heavier and heavier weights is a much easier method of building muscle size.

There are obvious benefits to doing bodyweight exercises (as mentioned above) but using weights will get you SIZE faster.

What! Aren’t you the bodyweight dude, Todd? Why are you telling us to use weights?

I’m not telling you to use weights. You CAN build muscle size and amazing definition with just bodyweight exercises. However, it’s easier to do when you use weights. Personally, I find **freedom** in bodyweight training which is why I proclaim this method.

You choose your own path based on your goals.

I have no desire to get as big as Arnold. I do, however, have a desire to have a really nice physique which CAN be done with correct bodyweight training.

**WHY SPLIT YOUR BODY INTO PARTS?**

At this point, you may be thinking a very important question: “If bodyweight exercises are better designed for working the body as a whole, why should I split my routine into parts? For
example, why should I work my arms separately from my whole body?

It is true that some exercises work the body as a unit.

Here are a few of my favorite:

- **Squat Thrust with Push Up**
- **Hindu Push Up**
- **Gracie Drill** (My favorite!)
- **Wall Walks**
- **Spider Push Ups**
- **Pyramids**
- **Bridges**
- **Bear Walks**

When you do any of the exercises above, you’ll be strengthening your chest, back, arms, legs and core. *Isn’t this enough?*

*Pretty much covered the whole body, right?*

In order to build muscle and increase muscle definition, you’ve got to have some level of isolation.

If you are ONLY doing “whole body” movements than one of two things will occur:

**1. You’ll fatigue your body as a whole**

By this I mean that you’ll get tired, but you won’t feel it in one particular area. It will be a generalized fatigue that is great for
increasing **cardiovascular conditioning** and muscular endurance, but not so much for muscular hypertrophy (increase in size).

**2. You’re weakest body part will give out first.**

For example, if your weakest body part is your triceps, then when you do the Hindu Push Up (mentioned above) you’ll find it very difficult to push back up.

You’ll still be building some level of muscle definition but its not as effective as targeting the tricep (similar to how weight lifting does).

This leads me to a major point in bodyweight training:

Some bodyweight arm exercises will be more isolating than others. You should use both. The ones that are more isolating will help build greater definition and target the muscle more effectively. The ones that include more synergistic muscles (whole body training) will help strengthen the surrounding muscles and build more whole body strength.

*Make sense?*

Alright, let’s carry on...
WHAT REP RANGES SHOULD I SHOOT FOR WHEN DOING THESE BODYWEIGHT ARM EXERCISES?

This totally depends on your goal. Below, I’ve laid out several rep/set schemes based on the three goals: build muscle, build strength and build endurance.

GOAL 1: BUILD MUSCLE

If you are trying to **build muscle**, you must fatigue the muscle within a mid rep range (ideally 8-12 rep range). This doesn’t mean stopping once you’ve hit this number. This means finding a bodyweight exercise where you naturally can’t do any more than 8-12 reps.

**What about sets?**

In order to build muscle size, you NEED volume. By volume, I mean sets. You need to do a large number of sets in order to fully tear the muscle tissue and have it rebuild. I recommend 8 sets for each exercise (lately I’ve been experimenting with 15 sets and loving it! It’s actually a super set where I move back and forth from a bicep and tricep exercise. It’s an absolute killer and I’m sure I’ll share more in a future post).

EIGHT full sets for EACH exercise is a great target for building muscle.

**What about rest periods?**
You want to keep rest periods to a minimum when training for size. Keep rest periods in the 30-60 second range.

**GOAL 2: BUILD STRENGTH**

If your goal is to build strength then you’ll want to fatigue within a lower rep range (ideally 6-8). Same thing applies. You should not just stop when you reach those numbers. When you are creating your routine, pick HARDER exercises where you literally can’t do any more reps than 6-8.

**What about sets?**

When building strength you can get away with fewer sets. These sets can even be spread out over the course of a full day. This method is called ‘Greasing the Groove” and will help neurons “learn” the patterns needed to perform the movement. This is an important component of strength. Keep sets to around 3-4 but if you are spreading your sets out over the course of a day you can do more.

**What about rest periods?**

Rest periods should be long. At a minimum, rest for 90 seconds but can be longer like in the 2-3 minute range.
GOAL 3: BUILD ENDURANCE

You can build endurance with any amount of reps beyond 12 reps. The structure inside the capillaries of your arms is changing when you work out for endurance. They are adapting so they can carry more oxygen to your muscles. You won’t see an increase in size when training for endurance but this is a very helpful type of cross training for sports. For example, if you are a biker or a runner you can increase your endurance by doing bodyweight squats for reps greater than 12.

What about sets?

Since each set is longer (over 12 reps) you can decrease the number of total sets. Stick to 3-4 total.

What about rest periods?

Rest periods should be mid-range: about 90 seconds.

Now that you have a basic understanding of HOW to train, let’s get into the nitty gritty exercises.

45 BODYWEIGHT ARM EXERCISES TO HELP YOU BUILD STRENGTH & DEFINITION
Below you will find a very detailed guide for building strength, muscle and endurance in the arms.

I have divided each part into sections for ease of use. I also broke up the sections into “Beginner”, “Intermediate”, and “Advanced”.

Remember that you need to pick an exercise that forces you to fatigue within your desired rep range goal.

**BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES FOR SHOULDERS**

Below you’ll find some awesome exercises for building up your shoulders. Some of these also work the tricep muscles but are mostly targeting the front, middle or posterior part of the deltoid (should muscle).
BEGINNER BODYWEIGHT SHOULDER EXERCISES

HIGH PLANK

![Plank on Hands](image)

PUSH BACK PUSH UPS

![New Push Up Variation - The Push Back Push Up](image)
ARM CIRCLES

BIRD DOG

STANDING WALL ANGELS
AIR PUNCHES
INTERMEDIATE BODYWEIGHT SHOULDER EXERCISES

HANDSTAND AGAINST WALL

ELBOW TWISTS (HELICOPTERS)

STRETCH PUSH UP
WIDE WARM PUSH UP
ONE ARM STATIC PLANK HOLD

ADVANCED BODYWEIGHT SHOULDER EXERCISES

HANDSTAND PUSH UP
PIKE PUSH UP

L SIT

TUCK PLANCHE PUSH UPS
REVERSE WALL WALKS

BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES FOR BICEPS

The biceps are a fun muscle to work because they are in front and you can see the swelling during the workout. Make sure that you choose exercises that naturally force you to fatigue within the desired rep range.
BEGINNER BODYWEIGHT BICEP EXERCISES

CHAIR CHIN UPS

INVERTED UNDERHAND

ROW WITH GRIP

INTERMEDIATE BODYWEIGHT BICEP EXERCISES
**Static Tension**

Vince shows it with weight but you can do this without weight as a static tension exercise.
CHIN UPS

LUMBERJACK CHIN UPS

CLOSE GRIP CHIN UPS
ADVANCED BODYWEIGHT BICEP EXERCISES

ONE ARM CHIN UPS

ARCHER PULL UPS
Super Slow Negative Chin Ups

These can be done even slower. Try for at least a 10 second count on the eccentric (down phase).

ONE ARM CHIN UP HOLD

BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES FOR TRICEPS

Many of these triceps exercises also work the chest. However, there are ways of modifying each exercise so that it targets
more of the tricep. Watch the video to learn how to modify each exercise.
BEGINNER BODYWEIGHT TRICEP EXERCISES

WALL PUSH UPS FOR TRICEPS

BENCH DIPS
LYING FLOOR TRICEP DIPS

INTERMEDIATE BODYWEIGHT TRICEP EXERCISES

TRICEP PUSH UPS
CLOSE GRIP PUSH UPS

ADVANCED BODYWEIGHT TRICEP EXERCISES

TRIANGLE PUSH UPS
HALF PLANK TIGER BENDS

MIKE CALLS THESE TRICEP EXTENSIONS BUT I CALL THEM HALF PLANK TIGER BENDS.

L SIT

BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES FOR FOREARMS & HANDS

When you strengthen the forearms and hands this will improve your ability to perform other exercises. Think about a pull up as
an example. You might have great bicep and back strength but if your grip gives out than you’ll never be able to use the pull up as an exercise for strengthening your biceps and lats. When doing **calisthenics**, you need to have a strong grip. The exercises below will help you build strength in your forearms and hands.

**BEGINNER BODYWEIGHT FOREARM/HAND EXERCISES**

**Supported Hangs**

This guy is doing an unsupported hang but all you have to do is keep some weight on the ground to start until you can hang unsupported.
INTERMEDIATE BODYWEIGHT FOREARM/HAND EXERCISES

UNSUPPORTED HANGS

5 FINGER HIGH PLANKS
Fingertip Push Ups

Your arms don’t need to be extended to get the benefit in your finger and grip strength.

ADVANCED BODYWEIGHT FOREARM/HAND EXERCISES

ONE ARM HANGS
5 Finger High Planks on One Arm

The person in this video has his hand down. You would want to pop up so you are on your fingers.

Fingertip Pull Ups

You don’t need to try to go for 1 or 2 fingers. Stay at 4 fingers and as you get stronger drop down to fewer fingers.

HOW TO MAKE ANY OF THESE EXERCISES HARDER

Ok, that should give you a great starting point for your bodyweight arm training.
However, remember that you must try to fatigue within a certain rep range depending on your goal in order to (a) build muscle (b) build strength or (c) build endurance.

So here are 3 techniques that I like to incorporate into some of the sets in order to make them harder.

1. **Increase Time Under Tension**

Spending more **time under tension** will help you fatigue the muscle more effectively. If you find an exercise too easy you can very quickly make it harder by decreasing your speed of the positive (concentric) and negative (eccentric) phase of the movement.

2. **Focus On The Eccentric Contraction**

The eccentric phase of the movement is when the muscle is lengthening but its under tension. Research has shown that this phase is where most of the muscle damage is done. If your goal is to build muscle, then spend most of your time here.

3. **Increase Squeeze While Doing Movement**

In my **Isometrics Strength** program I go into this in more detail but essentially you can squeeze the muscle harder than what is needed to perform the movement. This uses dynamic tension and recruits more muscle fibers. It’s a great way to tear more muscle tissue.
There are many ways of structuring your workout.

Here are just a few. There is no “right” way. My general recommendation is to train one way for 2-3 months and then switch up. When you change up your routine you force your body to keep adjusting to the changes. This prevent plateau.

**Method 1: Biceps & Triceps On Different Days**

This is just like a traditional bodybuilding plan. Chest/Triceps will be worked on Monday. Back/Biceps will be worked on Tuesday. Legs on Wed and repeat, taking Sunday off. Shoulders can be either Monday or Tuesday.

The benefit of this method is that you don’t inadvertently fatigue the triceps when they shouldn’t be worked. For example, most chest exercises will require the use of the triceps. Since they are worked on the same day, it doesn’t really matter. If you worked the triceps on the same day you worked back (say for example, Monday), when you worked the Chest and biceps on Tuesday, you’d also be working the triceps and not giving them a full rest.

**Method 2: Biceps & Triceps on Same Day**

This method is known as “Arm Day” and is the day everyone looks forward to because you get a tremendous pump in your
arms (which feels great!). Do this day after your Chest/Back day.

**Method 3: Whole Body Method**

If you are not interested in muscle isolation you can work your entire body using many of the exercises found here. However, don’t use this method every day. Limit it to 3-4 days out of the week to give your body necessary time to rebuild and recover.

**HOW DO I STRETCH MY ARMS?**

There are many different methods of stretching.

I’m not going to do into too much depth here other than to emphasize that before any workout you want to do dynamic stretches, meaning movement. Static stretches (no movement) can be performed after the workout to increase flexibility.

You can learn a lot more about my stretching philosophy and learn a ton of arm stretches here.
Alright, now on to the fun stuff right? 😊

Below I have listed some awesome bodyweight arm workouts you can perform.

Check them out. I’ve again categorized them for you based on beginner, intermediate and advanced.

**BEGINNER BODYWEIGHT ARM WORKOUTS**

- **Home Upper Body Workout Without Weights**
- **Purely Twins Quick Arm & Core Workout**
- **Bodyweight Arm Workout**

**INTERMEDIATE BODYWEIGHT ARM WORKOUTS**

- **15 Minute Bodyweight Arm Workout**
- **Colossal Base Bicep Workout**

**ADVANCED BODYWEIGHT ARM WORKOUTS**

- **Extreme Bodyweight Shoulder Workout**
BODYWEIGHT ARM RESOURCES

Bodyweight Exercise Full Video Library

Periodic Table of Bodyweight Exercises
GREAT VIDEO FOR MORE BICEP EXERCISES

BODYWEIGHT ARM WORKOUT VIDEO
As you can see there are MANY methods for training your arms.

Bodyweight Arm Training is not an exact science. Arms are worked inadvertently when you perform any number of other bodyweight exercises. However, if you really want your guns to pop and have beautiful definition than isolating the biceps and triceps will be a great method.

Go ahead and build your own workout or try one of the workouts above.
Remember to change up your routine every 2-3 months and you’ll have beautifully defined arms... using just bodyweight training!

Let me know if you have any questions.

-Bodyweight Todd

FOR MORE INFORMATION: