SOFTWARE & TECH

How To Do A Back Walkover

Published: November 20, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Introduction: The Art and Appeal of the Back Walkover

Few gymnastics skills capture the imagination quite like the back walkover. It is a movement that blends strength, flexibility, and control into one fluid arc of motion. Whether you are a budding gymnast, a cheerleader looking to expand your tumbling repertoire, or a dancer aiming to add more dynamic movement to your routine, learning how to do a back walkover is a rewarding milestone. It represents a bridge between basic floor skills and more advanced acrobatic elements.

This guide is designed to walk you through every stage of mastering this skill. We will break down the mechanics, address the common fears associated with going backward, and provide the drills and conditioning exercises that will build the foundation you need. The journey requires patience and consistent practice, but with the right approach, it is an achievable goal for many athletes. As you read, remember that progress is personal. Focus on your own technique and celebrate the small victories along the way.

Understanding the Prerequisites: What You Need Before You Start

Before you attempt to throw yourself backward over your hands, it is crucial to assess your current fitness level. A back walkover is not a beginner skill; it requires a specific combination of physical attributes. Jumping into the skill without the necessary strength and flexibility is a recipe for injury and frustration.

Essential Flexibility Requirements

Flexibility is arguably the most important prerequisite. The movement demands a significant range of motion in several key areas. A deep, comfortable back bend, often called a bridge or wheel pose, is non-negotiable. You need to be able to push up into a bridge with your arms fully extended and your shoulders directly over your hands. Your shoulders need to be open and flexible enough to allow your head to pass through without strain. Tight hamstrings will also make it difficult to kick your legs over with control. Consistent daily stretching, focusing on your back, shoulders, hips, and hamstrings, is the foundation upon which this skill is built.

Necessary Strength and Stability

Strength is equally vital. Your core muscles must be strong enough to control your body as it inverts. Weak abs can cause your back to arch excessively, leading to a loss of balance. Your shoulder and arm strength is needed to support your full body weight while you are upside down. Leg strength, particularly in your glutes and hamstrings, is required for the powerful kick-over phase. Drills like planks, push-ups, and glute bridges should be a regular part of your conditioning routine to prepare your body for the demands of this skill.

Safety First: The Importance of a Spotter and Proper Surface

Never attempt a back walkover on a hard surface like concrete or tile. A gymnastics mat, a sprung floor, or a thick, soft grassy area are the only appropriate places to practice. Even more important is the presence of a qualified spotter, especially in the early stages. A spotter can guide your hips, support your lower back, and prevent you from collapsing or falling in a dangerous way. If you are learning without a coach, ask for help from a friend or family member who is strong enough to support your weight and has been instructed on how to spot safely.

Breaking It Down: A Step-by-Step Guide to the Back Walkover

Now that you have the prerequisites in place, let us dissect the movement. Think of the back walkover as a series of connected positions, not one single, terrifying motion. Focus on mastering each step before moving on to the next.

Step 1: The Starting Position

Stand tall with your feet shoulder-width apart. Raise your arms straight up toward the ceiling, keeping them close to your ears. This is your starting position. Engage your core by pulling your belly button toward your spine and squeeze your glutes. This tension will protect your lower back. Find a focal point on the wall in front of you, slightly above eye level. Do not look down. Your posture here sets the tone for the entire movement.

Step 2: The Lean Back

This is often the most intimidating part. From your starting position, begin to lean backward as one solid unit. Your hips should remain pushed forward, and your core should stay tight. Do not bend at the waist or let your knees buckle forward. The lean should come from your upper back and shoulders. Keep your eyes focused on your hands as they begin to travel backward. The key here is control. You are not falling; you are leaning with intention. Maintain the tension in your glutes and core to prevent your back from collapsing.

Step 3: The Heel Drive and Hand Placement

As you continue to lean back, you will need to shift your weight onto your heels. This allows you to maintain your balance. Simultaneously, your hands should reach for the floor. The goal is to place your hands flat on the ground, shoulder-width apart, with your fingers pointing back toward your feet. Do not fling your arms back wildly. Control the descent. Aim for your hands to make contact with the floor at the same moment your head is in a neutral position, not cranked back. A common mistake here is to look at the floor, which arches the back too early. Instead, keep your eyes on your hands.

Step 4: The Push and Arch

The moment your hands touch the floor, you enter the bridge position. Immediately push firmly through your shoulders and arms to create a stable base. Your shoulders should be directly over your hands. Now, arch your back slightly to create space for your legs and hips to travel over. From this bridge position, drive your dominant leg (the one you feel most comfortable kicking with) straight up and over your head. Think of kicking your toes toward the ceiling, not over to the side. The power for this kick comes from your glutes and hamstrings, not from your lower back.

Step 5: The Leg Switch and Landing

As your dominant leg passes the vertical point, it will begin to travel downward toward the floor on the other side. This is the moment for the leg switch. Your supporting leg (the one still on the ground) must push off the floor to join the kicking leg. In a clean walkover, your legs should split in the air briefly—like a straddle or split—before your first foot lands. Your toes should point throughout the entire motion. As your first foot touches the ground in front of you, you will land in a lunge position. Your arms should remain up by your ears, and your core should still be engaged to control the landing. Finish with your chest up and your gaze forward.

Common Mistakes and How to Correct Them

Even with a clear understanding of the steps, several errors frequently plague learners. Recognizing these mistakes is the first step to fixing them.

Mistake 1: Bending the Knees in the Bridge

When the knees bend significantly during the bridge phase, it means the weight is resting on the legs instead of the shoulders and arms. This makes it difficult to kick over smoothly. **The Fix:** Strengthen your shoulders and focus on pushing them directly over your hands. Stretch your shoulders regularly to improve range of motion. Practice holding a proper bridge with straight legs.

Mistake 2: Kicking to the Side

A kick that goes off to the side often stems from a fear of going backward or a lack of shoulder flexibility. It creates a crooked, unstable walkover. **The Fix:** Practice kicking straight up over your body in a handstand or against a wall. Ensure your hands are placed directly in line with your shoulders. Work on shoulder opening exercises to feel more comfortable inverted.

Mistake 3: Looking at the Floor

Dropping your head back to look at the floor before your hands are down is a major issue. It puts enormous strain on the neck and throws off your center of gravity. **The Fix:** Train the initial lean with your eyes on your hands. You can practice spotting a fixed point on the ceiling or wall as you go back. The correct head position is neutral during the lean, not dropped back.

Effective Drills to Build Your Back Walkover

Breaking the skill down into targeted drills can accelerate your progress and build confidence. Dedicate time to these exercises before attempting the full walkover.

Drill 1: The Wall Walk

This drill builds the necessary back flexibility and prepares your body for the inverted position. Lie on your back with your feet flat on a wall, knees bent at a 90-degree angle. Place your hands by your ears, fingers pointing toward your shoulders. Push up into a bridge, then walk your hands closer to the wall. Hold the position and breathe. This strengthens your back and opens your shoulders in a safe, controlled environment.

Drill 2: The Hill or Incline Walkover

Using a padded incline mat or a stack of firm fitness mats to create a slope can dramatically reduce the fear and strength required. Stand at the top of the incline and perform the lean back onto the elevated surface. The angle of the hill helps guide your hands to the floor and makes the kick-over much easier. Mastering the walkover on an incline is a massive confidence booster.

Drill 3: The Assisted Kick-Over from a Bridge

Start by holding a stable bridge on the floor. From this position, practice kicking one leg up and over your head. Do not try to stand up yet. Just get comfortable with the sensation of your legs passing over your face. Your spotter can support your hips during this kick. This drill isolates the leg action and removes the fear of the initial lean.

Conclusion: Patience, Practice, and Progress

Learning how to do a back walkover is a journey that tests both your physical limits and your mental resolve. It requires a blend of dedication, intelligent training, and a willingness to be uncomfortable. Do not be discouraged if you do not achieve it in a day, a week, or even a month. Every stretch you hold, every plank you complete, and every practice bridge you hold brings you closer to the goal. Focus on mastering the individual components—the flexible back, the strong shoulders, and the confident kick.

Listen to your body. Pain is a signal to stop and reassess. Celebrate the small achievements, like touching your hands for the first time in a lean or holding a steady bridge with straight legs. With consistent effort and a focus on proper technique, the back walkover will transform from a daunting challenge into a fluid, graceful movement that you can perform with pride. Now, step onto your mat, trust your preparation, and begin your journey.

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