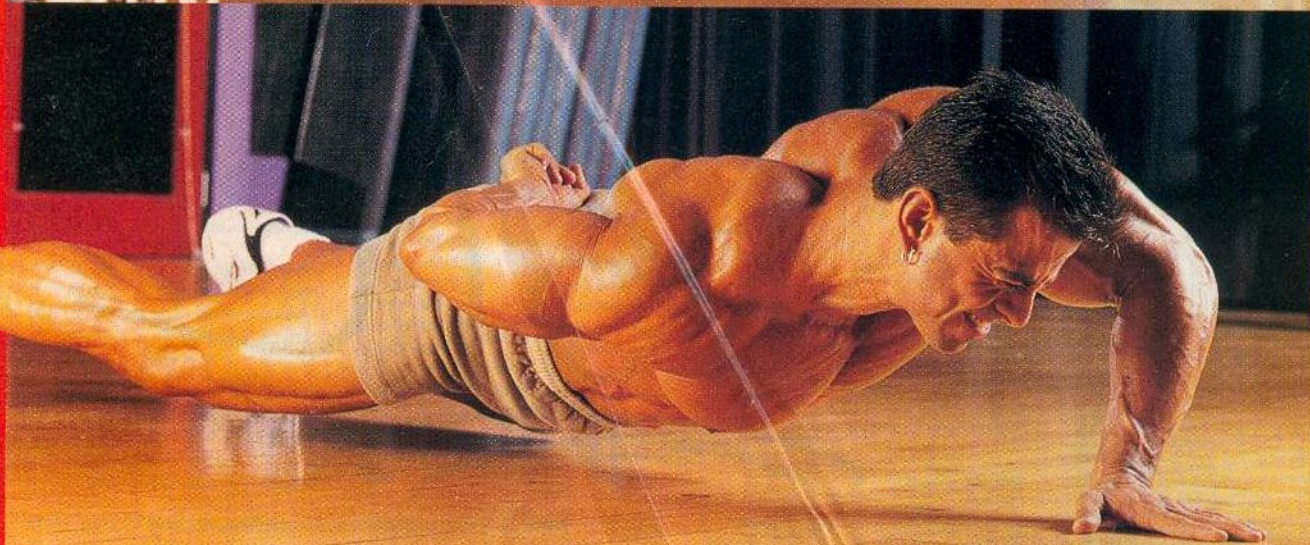
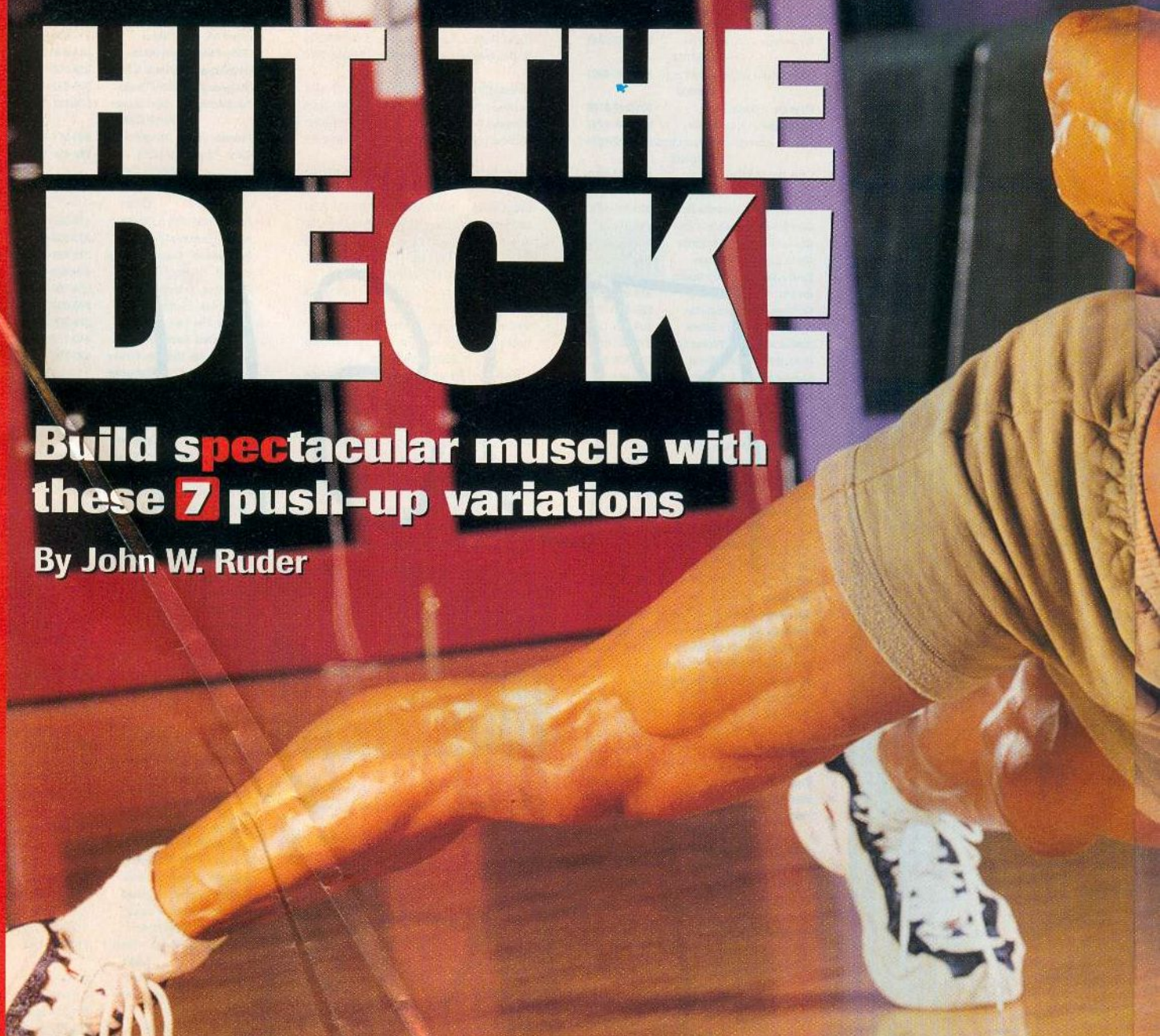


# HIT THE DECK!

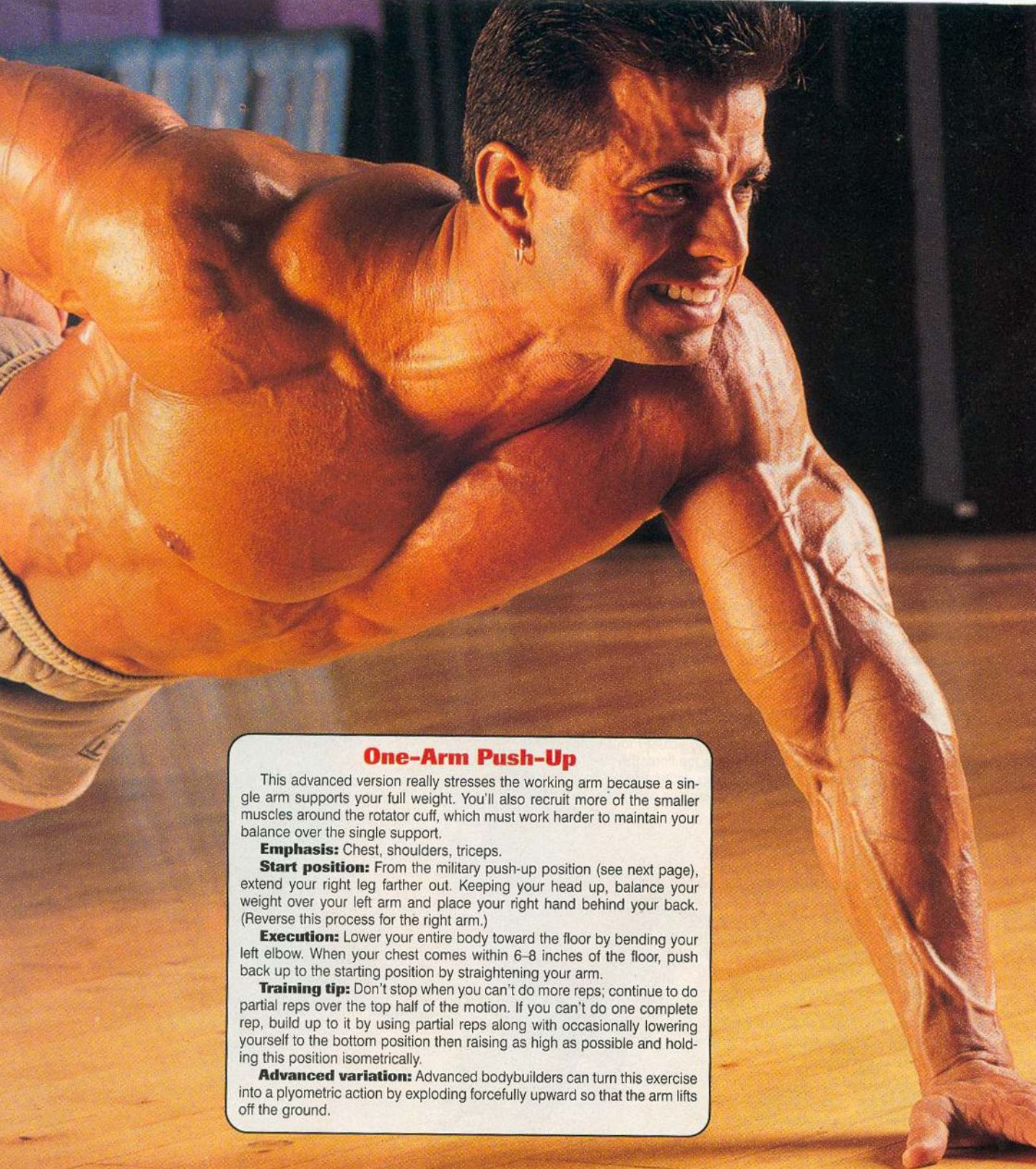
Build **spectacular** muscle with these **7** push-up variations

By John W. Ruder



Photos by Ralph DeHaan at World Gym, Lake Forest, California  
Model: Richard Longwin





### One-Arm Push-Up

This advanced version really stresses the working arm because a single arm supports your full weight. You'll also recruit more of the smaller muscles around the rotator cuff, which must work harder to maintain your balance over the single support.

**Emphasis:** Chest, shoulders, triceps.

**Start position:** From the military push-up position (see next page), extend your right leg farther out. Keeping your head up, balance your weight over your left arm and place your right hand behind your back. (Reverse this process for the right arm.)

**Execution:** Lower your entire body toward the floor by bending your left elbow. When your chest comes within 6–8 inches of the floor, push back up to the starting position by straightening your arm.

**Training tip:** Don't stop when you can't do more reps; continue to do partial reps over the top half of the motion. If you can't do one complete rep, build up to it by using partial reps along with occasionally lowering yourself to the bottom position then raising as high as possible and holding this position isometrically.

**Advanced variation:** Advanced bodybuilders can turn this exercise into a plyometric action by exploding forcefully upward so that the arm lifts off the ground.

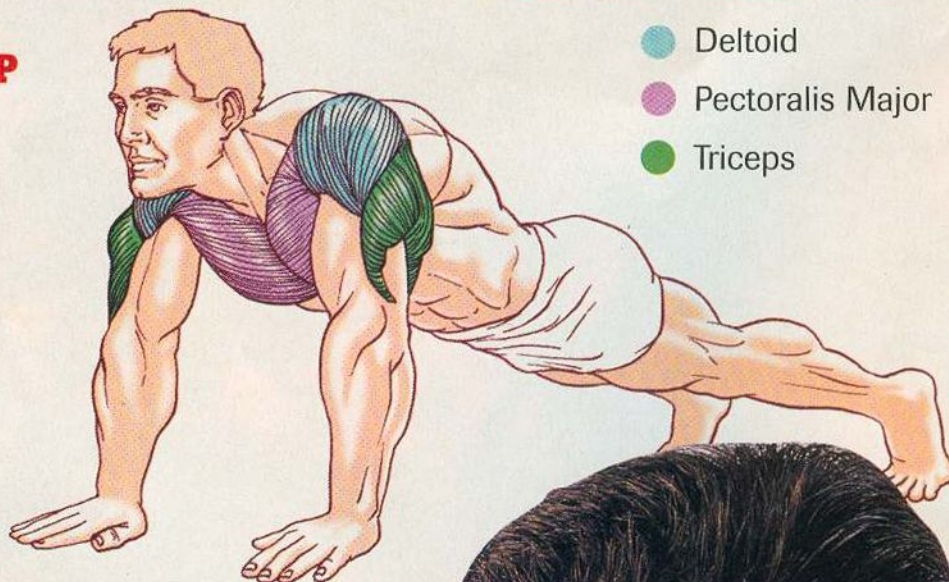
“Okay, son, every time I see your ugly face, you better be doing push-ups!” the drill sergeant barked. To this day, I’m not sure if I was a screw-up or just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Still, the bottom line was that I entered Army Infantry School at a well-conditioned 5’9” and 155 pounds and graduated just 16 weeks later a solid 20 pounds heavier. As I progressed through various military schools, I noticed that push-ups (and their variations) were used extensively during the Army’s physical training sessions.



## KINESIOLOGY OF THE PUSH-UP

The prime movers in the push-up are the shoulders, the chest (pectoralis major) and back part of the arms (triceps). The pec minor is also involved to a certain degree.

During the initial (lowering) phase, the muscles of the shoulders, chest and arms work in eccentric contraction as the body is slowly lowered to a position in which the upper part of the arms are parallel to the floor. In pushing up, the muscles of the shoulders, chest and arms are contracted concentrically, shortening and pushing against the bodyweight resistance.



- Deltoid
- Pectoralis Major
- Triceps

### Military Push-Up

This is the common push-up.

**Emphasis:** Chest, shoulders, triceps.

**Start position:** Lie facedown with your hands flat on the floor just outside and slightly in front of your shoulders, your fingers spread and pointing forward. Lift yourself up by straightening your arms so that only your hands and toes are in contact with the floor, keeping your heels together. Your body should form a rigid line (knees locked so that your legs are straight, abdominals tight, back straight). Keep your head up slightly.

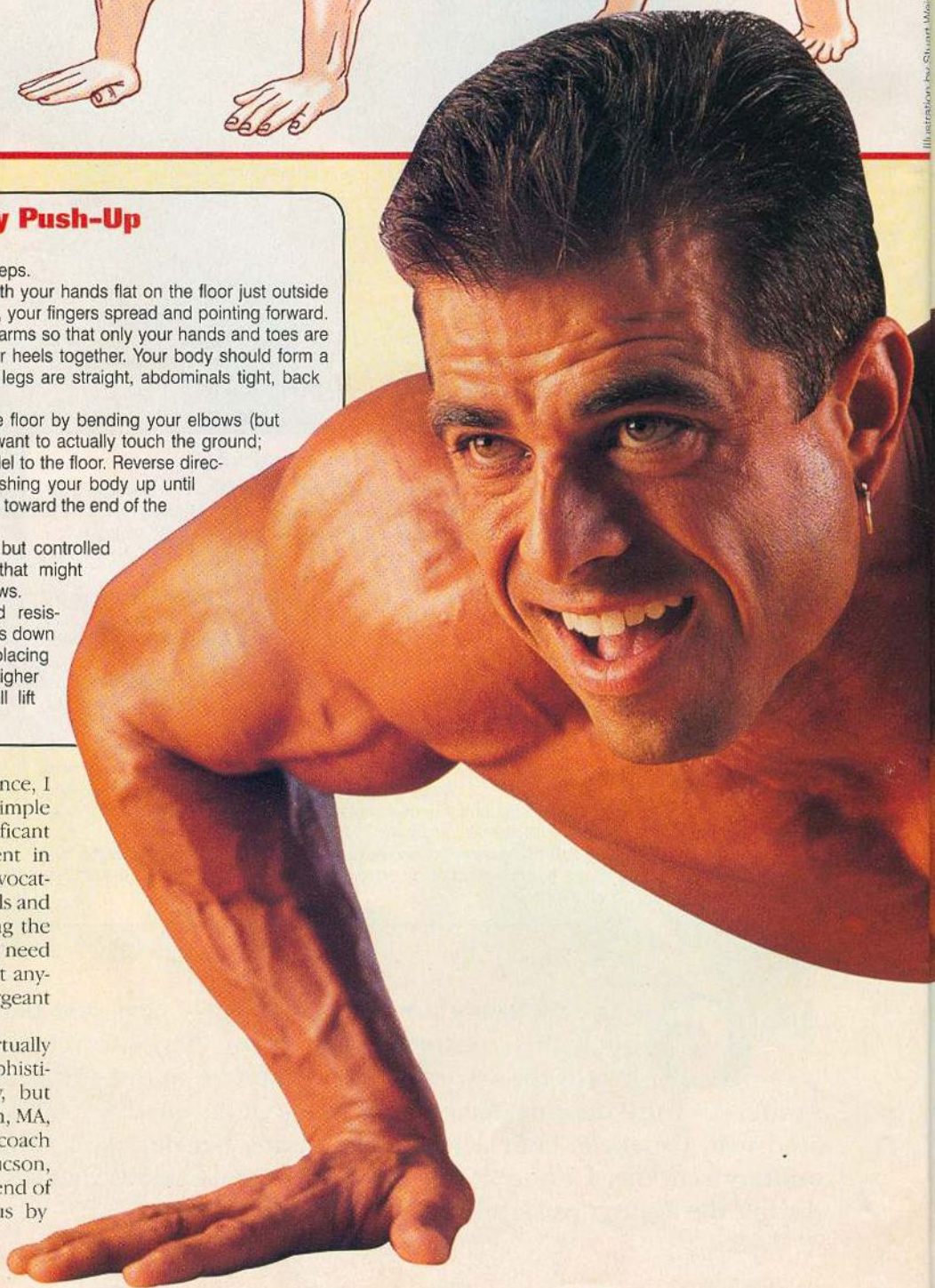
**Execution:** Lower yourself to the floor by bending your elbows (but keeping your body rigid). You don't want to actually touch the ground; stop when your upper arms are parallel to the floor. Reverse directions by straightening your arms, pushing your body up until your elbows are nearly locked. Exhale toward the end of the upward motion.

**Training tip:** Use an explosive but controlled speed; don't use a quick motion that might cause you to hyperextend at the elbows.

**Advanced variation:** To add resistance, have your training partner press down against you or elevate your feet by placing them on a bench (below right). The higher your feet, the more resistance you'll lift (and you'll change the feel slightly).

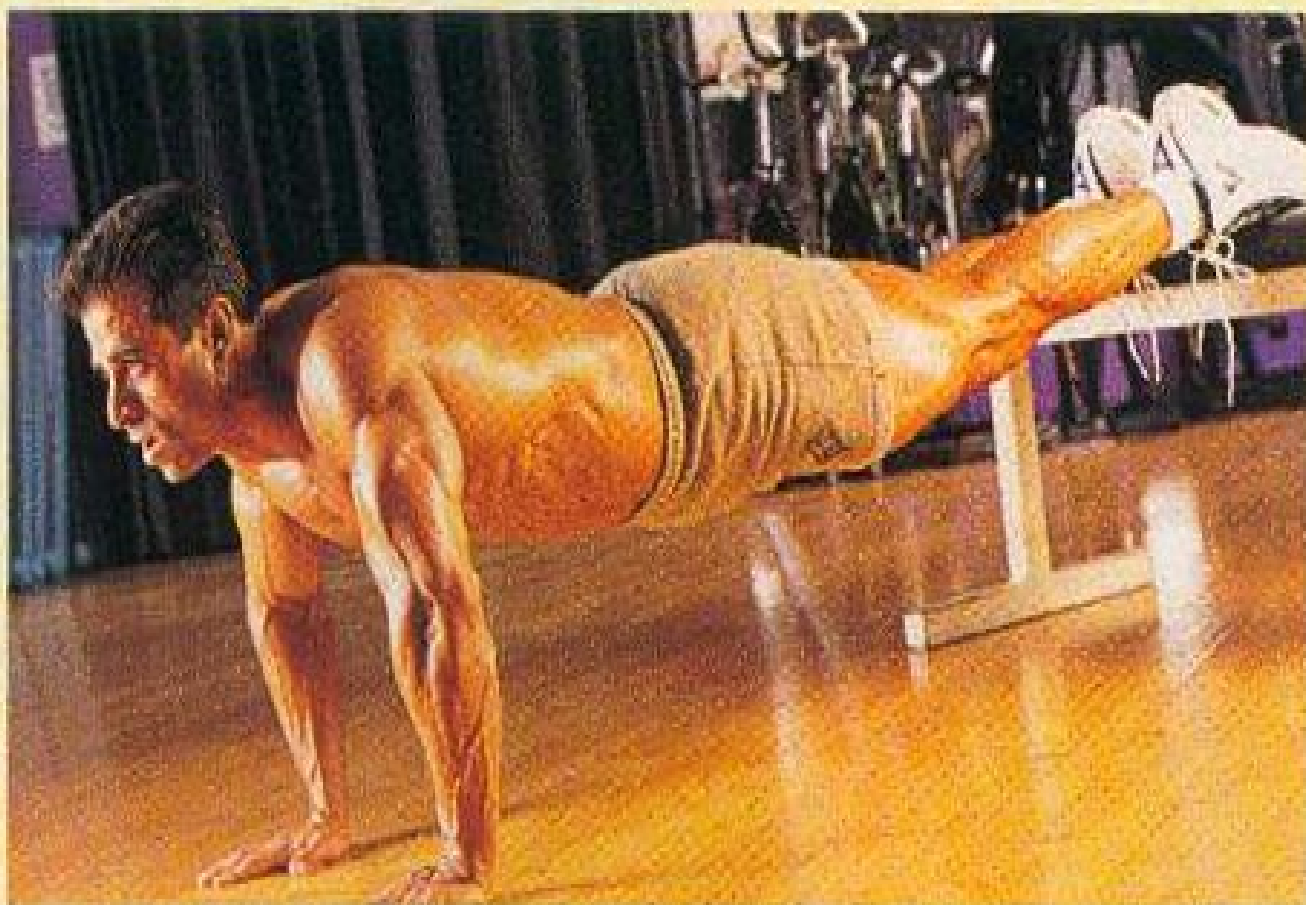
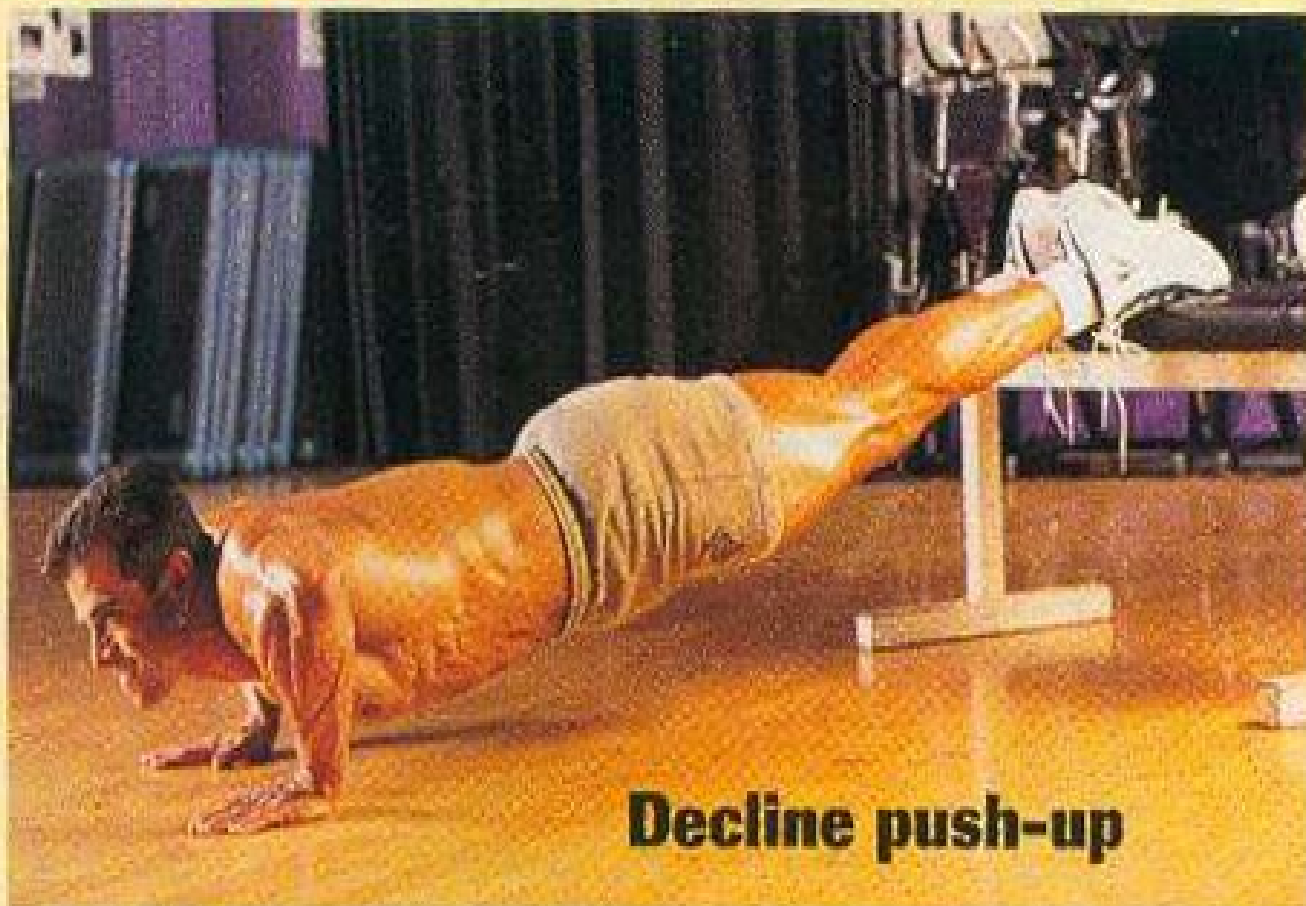
Based on this personal experience, I wondered: Could something as simple as the push-up stimulate significant strength and muscle development in the upper torso? Now, I'm not advocating that you toss aside your barbells and dumbbells, but I do suggest giving the push-up a closer look. You don't need any equipment, and you can do it anywhere — even if the only drill sergeant around is your significant other!

The basic push-up has been virtually abandoned by today's more sophisticated iron-pumping community, but that could be a mistake. Dan Wirth, MA, CSCS, strength and conditioning coach at the University of Arizona in Tucson, says: "We use the push-up at the end of a workout as a volume stimulus by



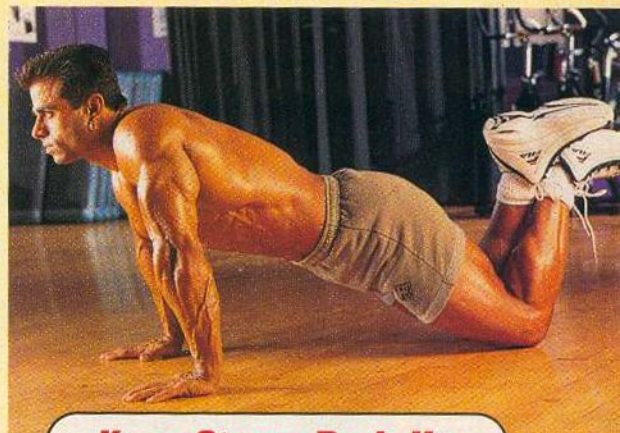
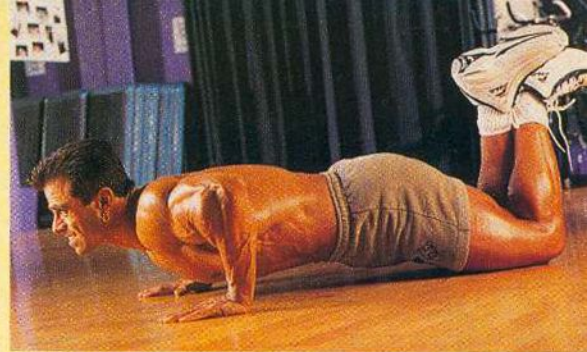
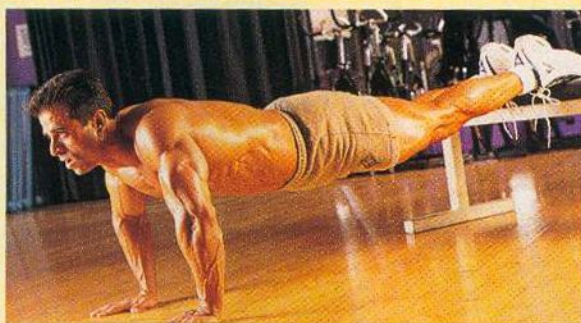
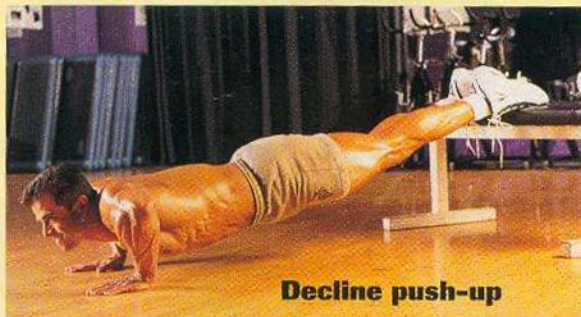


# VARIATION





## VARIATION



### Knee-Stance Push-Up

Keeping your knees on the ground reduces the resistance of the military push-up.

**Emphasis:** Chest, shoulders, triceps.

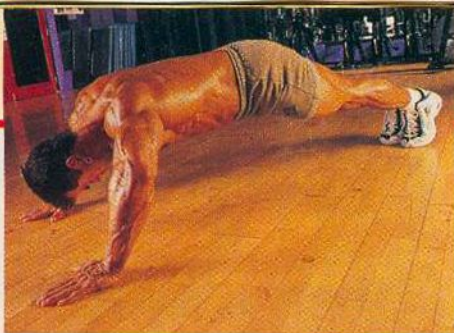
**Start position:** Lie facedown on the floor with your hands just outside your shoulders. Cross your ankles and raise your feet. Keep your back straight and hips locked, making a straight line from your knees to your neck.

**Execution:** Same as the military push-up.

**Training tip:** Any time you can't complete the desired repetitions in any push-up variation, simply lower your knees to the ground and finish using the knee-stance push-up.







## COMMON ERRORS IN PUSH-UP TECHNIQUE

1) Dipping your hips up and down instead of lowering your shoulders. **Correction:** Make sure the push-up action results from the bending of your elbows and the lowering of your entire body.

2) Arching your back as your shoulders are lowered, keeping your hips in the air. **Correction:** Make sure your abdominals are isometrically contracted, which will help to keep your back rigid.

3) Bouncing instead of pausing at the bottom. **Correction:** Force yourself to pause for a two count at the bottom of the motion.

4) Failure to completely straighten your arms in the up position. **Correction:** Concentrate on tightening your pecs and holding the up position for a two count.

5) Failure to keep your head up and eyes focused in front of you. **Correction:** Pick out a target on the wall in front of you and focus your vision there throughout the exercise.

6) Failure to reach the parallel position with the upper part of your arms. **Correction:** Do the exercise in front of a mirror, concentrating on the upper arm position throughout the repetition.



## Wide-Stance Push-Up

The wide position of the hands puts a greater stretch on the chest muscles but still hits the triceps.

**Emphasis:** Chest, shoulders, triceps

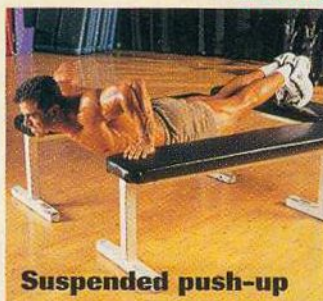
**Start position:** From the military push-up position, move your hands out as wide as possible, for most individuals, 8-10 inches outside your shoulders.

**Execution:** Similar to the military push-up. You should feel a greater stretch and direct stimulation in your chest area. The lower you allow your body to drop, the greater the stress placed on the pecs.

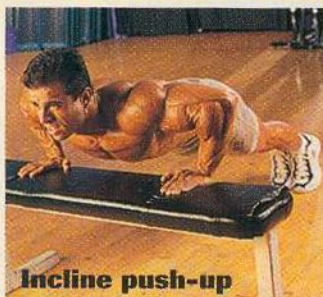
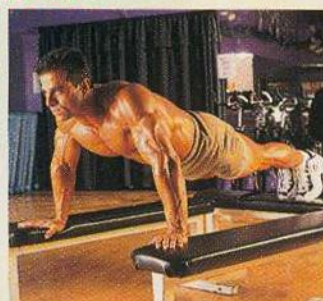
**Training tip:** By changing your body position, you can change the angle and feel to areas of your pecs. IFBB pro bodybuilder Jay Cutler suggests elevating your feet, or your hands on occasion, to work your chest somewhat differently.

**Advanced variation:** Arrange three benches into a partial rectangle. Place your feet on one bench and one hand on each of the other benches so that your body is suspended over the opening between them. This is called a suspended push-up. Lower yourself as far as possible between the three benches to increase the stretch and effectiveness. Do these push-ups slowly and avoid overstretching; the increased range of motion makes the muscles more vulnerable to tears and connective-tissue injury.

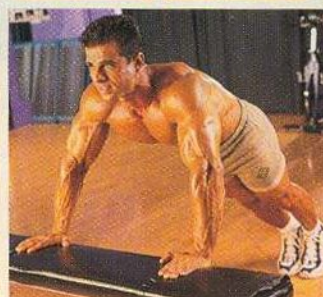
## VARIATIONS



Suspended push-up



Incline push-up





## Diamond Push-Up

By positioning your hands closer together, you'll increase the workload on your triceps, similar to the close-grip bench press.

**Emphasis:** Triceps, shoulders, chest.

**Start position:** Starting from the military push-up position, move your hands in until your thumbs and index fingers of each hand touch — the area in between will resemble a diamond. Your hands should now be directly below the middle of your chest when your arms are straight.

**Execution:** Keeping your entire body rigid, lower yourself toward the ground. When your chest is about 6 inches above your hands, press back up.

**Training tip:** To really develop that horseshoe definition in the triceps, make sure you lock out and squeeze the triceps tight for a two count at the top of each repetition.

**Advanced variation:** The diamond press is an excellent way to burn out the muscle as the finishing exercise in a compound set for either the triceps or pectorals.



the exercise slightly different for each individual, you should try the many variations. Once you feel it in your muscles, make whatever adaptations are necessary."

Strength coaches aren't the only ones sold on the benefits of the push-up. IFBB pro Jay Cutler says: "This is a forgotten basic movement that can actually produce mass and strength even for the advanced bodybuilder. The difference between the beginner and advanced lifter is the number of reps performed, degree of difficulty and the rest required before you start your next set."

So why, then, is the push-up so often ignored? Perhaps it just seems too darn simple; after all, it doesn't require a bench, plates or fancy machines. Or maybe it takes too much mental toughness to grind out the reps, especially as the going gets tough. Then again, perhaps we're all so focused on lifting heavier weight that we forget to back off once in a while — which would be an ideal time to include push-ups in our routine. Remember, get the form down right; you won't build any muscle if you're sidelined with a shoulder injury.



*John W. Ruder works at Valley Union High School in Elfrida, Arizona, where he coaches tennis, basketball and football in addition to teaching English and history. He has a bachelor of science degree in physical education from Olivet Nazarene University in Kankakee, Illinois, and*

*has a teaching credential for tennis through the U.S. National Tennis Association. Ranked as an amateur tennis player, John was in the army for five years and is still in the reserves.*

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