

Want better Cheerleading Jumps? The Tips, Techniques, and Drills for Improving your Toe Touches, Pikes, Hurdlers, and others.

by Ryan Jensen - [Cheerleading Stunt Academy](#); ACSM-HFS.
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There are Five Keys which one must utilize before working on their Cheerleading Jumps (in order of importance):

1. Jumping Power (more jump height)
2. Core / Hip / Groin / Leg Flexibility (increased range of motion)
3. Core and Hip Power (snap to position and snap back)
4. Recruitment of Shoulders / Arms (wind-up)
5. Aesthetics and Fine Tuning (pointed toes, head up)

There are many articles which cover one or a few of these topics, but it is necessary to understand all of them in order to critique and improve upon your current jump.

Of the 5 keys, two can immediately be implemented by merely focusing and simple technique work: 4) Recruitment of Shoulders/Arms, and 5) Aesthetics and Fine Tuning.

Recruiting the Shoulders and Arms in your Cheer Jumps

While it does help to have stronger and more powerful shoulders / arms, one may *immediately* see results after focusing on the wind up, without weeks of training. This is great news!

To illustrate what I am going to explain, picture yourself driving in a car without a seatbelt (for some, this is already natural -- bad habits, and I suggest you start wearing it!). Upon impact, what happens to your body? It continues in the same direction it had been going. Even though the car stopped, the momentum continued for your body. The **same** will happen if you powerfully swing your arms and abruptly stop them in the "T" motion / position; your body will continue its momentum upward.

I usually demonstrate the effectiveness of this technique by locking my knees and placing all my weight on my heels with my toes flexed (pointing up). Using only my shoulders and arms, I am able to lift myself off of the ground about 1 cm immediately after the abrupt stop. People who have stronger shoulders than I may be able to gain a few extra **inches**. Those with less power will not feel themselves lifting off of the ground, but will notice that their body feels lighter and will see the result much better should they stand on a scale and see its pin fly downward for a brief moment.

Note: it is important to have warmed up before trying this maneuver as your shoulder girdle may not be ready for the "rude awakening." Best-case scenario--feeling the pin-prickling sensation throughout their entire arm from blood being forced to their fingertips. Worst-case scenario--surgery, and months of recuperating and physical therapy. Not fun.

Achieving that extra “something” when hitting your Toe Touch

Aesthetics & Fine tuning is a little more than a hassle compared to the shoulder recruitment. It takes diligent practice in front of a mirror, friend, coach, or preferably a video camera. Body awareness and a sharp eye are your friends at this moment, and if you haven't become their friend yet, I suggest you start working on individual parts of your body by adjusting them (with your eyes closed) until you feel the proper placement. A simple example of what I mean: Close your eyes and put both arms down at your sides, then flex both arms until your elbow is at a 90 degree angle (the robot). Open your eyes and see how close you are. Continue this with parts of your body—especially your feet (pointed) and your “T” (same arm levels) on your toe-touch.

Getting the height you need to hit that beautiful Pike

Now it's down to the Nitty Gritty. By far, the number one tool to help you with your Cheerleading Jumps (Toe Touch, Pike, Hurdlers) is working on your jumping power, makes sense right? It should! In order to become better AT jumping, you must do what? JUMP! Squat jumps, jump rope, Switch-Split Lunge jumps, Leap Frogs, Vertical Jumps, Long Jumps, Jumping on one leg, Jumping with straddled legs, Everything you can think of and sounds fun, DO IT (not off bridges, that's falling, not jumping).

!! IMPORTANT: Do a couple sets of lunges and body squats before jumping with cold muscles !!

Also, make sure your landing is soft and ninja-cat-like before doing repeated jumps. Before you begin a jumping program, it is best to check with your physician first and receive an approval from them. After you are cleared to jump away, test yourself to see how high you can jump now. Every week, test yourself to see how much you are improving. If you improve and then plateau, try adding weight by holding dumbbells at your sides, or using a weighted vest, etc. There are many exercises that can be done to help your jumps, and you may ask me (Ryan, at the Cheerleading Stunt Academy) anytime.

Do Not Stretch the Truth...

There are many fallacies and myths circulating with Flexibility. One that must be put into the False drawer is static stretching *before* jumps! Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a second... static stretching before a power movement decreases your power by a substantial amount! Do NOT static stretch (stretch and hold), but rather, perform dynamic stretching (actively engaging the muscles while increasing range of motion, not to be confused with the bouncy ballistic stretching). Here is a healthy rule to live by with all sports – dynamic stretching before as a part of the warmup, partner stretch in between to gain flexibility while muscles are warm, and static stretch or partner stretch after as a cool down.

... but Do the True Stretch

With this main myth busted, we can move on to improving and gaining more flexibility. The tool to use for this is PNF Stretching (or partner stretching). It works like this. Have one person stretch you until you are slightly uncomfortable, hold for 10-30 seconds. Once the time is up, it is your turn to push against them using the same muscle that was just stretched! Push against them for 10-20 seconds. Relax and allow your partner to stretch you again for another 10-30 seconds and hold. This pattern may be repeated 3-5 times or until you are finished. There are many variances on this type of stretching which are also beneficial and are worth researching (e.g. partner stretches you, you push back, partner stretches you, you pull against, you push back, partner stretches you, etc.). You may contact me for more suggestions about variations as well. It may take awhile before you see the gains you are looking for, but keep doing them week after week (3-5 times/wk) until you reach the level you desire.

Putting the “Snap” into your Front and Side Hurdlers

Lastly, training the muscles surrounding your pelvic girdle are a must for any cheerleading jump. The main muscles to focus on are your hip flexors (the muscles that bring your legs to your torso), your gluteus maximus and hamstrings (the muscles that bring your legs toward your back), and your inner/outer hips (the muscles that snap the toe-touch open and snap your legs back together before landing). So, recap: Front, Back, Outer, and Inner. There are, like usual, numerous exercises to specifically condition these muscle groups to perform well for your jumps. The most notorious exercise is the seated straddle leg lifts (although I do not favor this one because of the lack of power). Another more useful exercise is the chorus-line kick (a more powerful movement which echoes the movements in your jumps, hooray!). The exercise I used to improve my ‘snap’ was hanging from a pull-up bar and snapping my legs to the bar (in a pike style). The best suggestion? Think about how you move your legs in the jump you are trying to improve, then find a safe and effective exercise that mimics that very same movement. This is how Sport Acceleration programs function! Genius, right? It is because it makes sense.

Last words of advice

To finish this article up, there are some things I’d like for you to understand before embarking on your new mission:

First, **always** consult your physician, coach, parent, personal trainer, strength and conditioning specialist beforehand. They may find that you are lacking in certain fundamental and critical elements which need to have primary focus before beginning a plyometric (jump training) routine (e.g. weak stabilizers, damaged joints, etc.). A lifetime of pain and regret could ensue if you do not take this primary step.

Secondly, make sure you are performing **proper** technique. This can be done by recruiting a personal trainer or strength coach with a nationally accredited certification to critique your movements. Or, like I did, take baby steps until you are comfortable with your technique.

Lastly, there are many ways to do the wind-up, swing through, follow through, cleans, transitions between jumps, etc. If you’d like more information, please leave a [comment at our website](#), where we will continue to post more [Tips and Techniques for Stunts, Jumps, and Tumbling](#).

Happy Jumping.

Quick Reference:

1. Jump, Jump, Jump - **at least** two days / week.
 - A. One session is hard, the next session is easy.
 - B. Squat Jumps work your upper legs.
 - C. Jumping Rope works your calves.
 - D. Try “Lemur” Jumps (Sideways Jumps) to work your inner and outer thighs.
2. Find a buddy to stretch with - **immediately following** jump exercises
 - A. Do PNF Stretching Techniques
 - i. Let someone stretch you for 10-30 sec.
 - ii. Push against them for 10-30 sec. (it helps if your partner slowly allows you to push back to resting position, i.e. push against throughout the whole range of motion).
 - iii. Relax and allow your partner to stretch you again for 10-30 sec.
 - iv. This time, have your partner Pull as you Pull in the direction which your partner has been stretching you.
 - v. Push against them for 10-30 sec.
 - B. Do dynamic stretches prior to practice, not static
 - C. Do static or partner stretches during or after practice.
3. Everything from your Chest down to your knees **should be conditioned**
 - A. work on powerful movements when using your hip and butt muscles
 - i. Leg kicks, fast leg lifts, hanging leg lifts, etc.
 - ii. To work your backward kicking muscles (butt), try putting one foot on a raised platform or step and kick down to jump up. Land back on the same foot softly while the other foot touches down to the ground.
 - iii. Using Resistance tubes or bands / ankle weights (properly) can also help these areas.
 - iv. Strong Kicking motions in a pool.
 - B. Crunches, Crunches, Crunches
 - i. Fast crunches
 - ii. Side crunches
 - iii. Twisting crunches
4. **Use** your shoulders and Arms to carry you higher.
 - A. Arms at your sides, swing them fast up to a “T,” Stopping abruptly
 - B. Use Medicine Balls to push powerfully above your head into the air
 - i. Elbows in front for a set (Like “raising the roof”)
 - ii. Elbows out for a set (like an “O”)
 - C. Use Medicine Balls or Resistance Bands to swing your arms upward in front of you (like doing the “wave”)
 - D. Use Medicine Balls or Resistance Bands to swing your arms upward from your sides (clean to a “T”).
5. **Check** your toes, head, back position, knees, etc. (the Pretty stuff)
 - A. Work on FEELING your body and where it is positioned before seeing it
 - i. close your eyes and ask a friend or use a camera, then tell them before they answer / viewing the footage.

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