

Grip Training for Handgunners



including Ron Avery's "Using Grip Products by IronMind"

IRONMIND®

Stronger Hands Shoot Straighter



Magnus Samuelsson crushing the CoC No. 4, as shown on the cover of *MILO*®: *Strength*, IronMind's flagship publication (December 2015, Vol. 23, No. 3).

A weak grip and wimpy wrists are a sure-fire way to miss your mark. Targeted training will give you improved recoil control as well as the strength and endurance to squeeze off round after round—you'll become a better shot and get more mileage from the time you spend at the range and the money you spend on ammunition.

A strong lower arm provides a stable platform for handgun shooting, and stronger fingers and overall grip will make squeezing the trigger easier—resulting in more accurate shooting, round after round. And if part of your challenge is weapons retention, your grip strength will determine whose hands your gun ends up in.

Properly approached, grip training is simple and effective—IronMind has been Grip Central since 1988, and we have both the training tools and the know-how to give you the edge you need to shoot more accurately. IronMind recommends three focal points for your handgun shooting-specific training program:

- **grip strength**
- **wrist strength**
- **muscle balance/recovery**

Grip strength

Captains of Crush (CoC) grippers: Build maximum grip strength for handgun recoil control

- gold standard for building maximum handgun grip strength
- designed to produce the quickest gains in grip strength
- premium materials, proprietary elements, precision manufacturing, unrivaled customer support
- 11 strengths for a perfect fit, whether you are just starting off, rehabilitating an injury, or already have splits in the .12 - .15 gauge



Your thumb is important in shooting, but when it comes to controlling a handgun, it's secondary to your other four fingers, so your focus is on what's called crushing grip (think shaking hands and squeezing). Captains of Crush grippers are your number one choice for increasing your crushing grip and they will be the cornerstone of your training.

If you would like to isolate your trigger finger for some additional training, IMTUG is ready to spring into action—IMTUG allows you to train your fingers one or two at a time, including your thumb, which helps stabilize your handgun.

IMTUG grippers: Train your fingers one or two at a time, including your trigger finger

- targeted training one or two fingers at a time, including the thumb
- 7 strengths, designed to work in tandem with CoC grippers
- premium materials, ergonomic design, precision manufacturing, unrivaled customer support
- tune up your weak fingers, advance on CoCs, power up your pinch grip



Wrist strength

The specific forms of wrist strength most important for shooting handguns accurately are best trained with a focus on radial and ulnar deviation, fancy terms for rotating your wrist in either a thumbs up or pinkies up direction. IronMind offers three proven training tools that target these movements. The Wrist Reinforcer™ is the training tool of first choice for heavy-duty, wrist-specific training; the Heavy Hammer II Leverage Bar, with its two-inch handle, trains your grip strength along with your wrist; and the Twist Yo' Wrist™ provides a complete or alternative to leverage exercises that is well-suited to conditioning or endurance work as well as strength training.

Wrist Reinforcer: heavy-duty, wrist-specific training



- focus solely on the wrist—forearm
- work your wrists and forearms into one very strong, solid unit
- lever it in all directions, do hold-outs for time, circles and figure-eights

Heavy Hammer II Leverage Bar: trains your grip strength along with your wrist

- combines grip and wrist—forearm work in one movement
- 2" diameter handle works your grip as you lever it up and down
- lever to front (radial), back (ulnar) and side to side (pronation/supination)



Twist Yo' Wrist: Stabilize your lower arm for more accurate handgun shooting

- trains both your grip and your wrist and forearm
- movement is radial and ulnar deviation (like opening a jar of peanut butter held sideways, one hand on the lid, one hand on the bottom)
- build a stable platform for handgun shooting, endurance, and greater accuracy
- train both concentrically (winding up the cord) and eccentrically (allowing it to unwind under control)



Muscle balance/recovery

The fastest way to gain strength is to train as hard as possible within your ability to recover—the same things that speed recovery also help prevent injuries and encourage rehabilitation if you have been injured.

Tennis elbow and a host of related maladies are often the result of overusing the flexors in your hands (the muscles that squeeze your hand shut). IronMind's Expand-Your-Hand Bands™ train the extensors, the muscles that allow your hands to open. Training with the Expand-Your-Hand Bands is easy, fun and effective—use them as directed and kiss your elbow pains goodbye; and the more you shoot, the more you benefit from their regular use.

Expand-Your-Hand Bands: train your extensors for muscle balance, faster recovery, and the ability to shoot round after round without developing elbow pains

- enjoy sparkling hand health, kiss elbow pain goodbye
- accelerate grip strength gains and shooting accuracy and endurance
- develop muscle balance, speed recovery, and enhance mobility
- prevent, eliminate or reduce pain from tennis or golfer's elbow, tendinitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, overuse, and abuse, such as a long day at the range



The IronMind EGG is substantial enough to give your hands a real workout. Egg-shaped for a natural fit and training from an endless variety of angles, the Green IronMind EGG is soft enough for a satisfying range of motion and tough enough for the world's strongest hands.

IronMind EGG: active rest, in between strength-building workouts

- 2 strengths, softer Green and firmer Blue
- substantial enough for a real grip strength workout
- ergonomic shape to fit comfortably in the hand, work from a variety of angles
- like a massage for the hands, use for active rest and conditioning on off days



Putting it all together

These and other IronMind grip products can make a difference in your shooting performance. Let firearms expert and professional shooter Ron Avery tell you how he trained with IronMind's grip products to recover from surgery and rebuild "the grip strength in my hands to between 165 and 195 lb. My splits are in the .12 - .15 range, and on a good day I can do this speed out to 15 yards in practice with really good hits."

Using Grip Products by IronMind*

by Ron Avery

One of the contributing factors of successful high-performance shooting lies in your ability and skill in controlling the handgun during the recoil cycle. While there are myriad bio-mechanical and neural processes involved in precisely how we create that control, none is more fundamental than strength in the hands, wrists, and forearms.

Strength is a commodity that we tend to take for granted . . . unless we don't have it. After having a complicated series of wrist reconstruction operations over a three-year period (caused by a previous accident a long time ago), I was faced with severely limited strength in my shooting hand, wrist, and arm. Without going into details, I was faced with the daunting task of learning how to shoot all over again. I had to both grip the gun in a new way as well regain strength in my upper body, arm, and hand.

When I first returned to the range in March 2005, one of the first things I noted was how much more the gun flipped due to my reduced strength. I knew what to do. I just couldn't do it. To put it in perspective, I was capable of shooting accurate splits in the .12—.15 range out to 10 yards prior to surgery in 2002. I was running splits in the .22—.26 range at 5 to 7 yards with marginal control on the target in March 2005.

I also ran out of strength—endurance in my grip much sooner. I remember shooting the Rocky Mountain 300 early in 2005 where they had 60-shot courses of fire. I ran out of trigger speed somewhere around shot 18 and wallowed my way through the rest of the course with splits in the .24—.26 range. Luckily the shots were close range for most of the courses.

*This article originally appeared in *Front Sight*, September/October 2008. Reprinted with permission.

The excessive flip and deficit in grip endurance was a pure strength issue. The technical, mechanical, and emotional aspects of trying to find my way back to my previous level of performance or greater while having to reformulate my shooting technique would take much longer. This is a tale for another time.

Having a background in strength training, I knew I would need to do specific training to bring myself up to speed quickly.

Program design goals

The key to shooting grip strength is to build your strength to a level where you can control the gun while still keeping a sizable reserve of strength. This reserve is critical to fine motor skills and shooting performance. If you have to use all your strength to hold onto the gun and try to control recoil, you will not be able to move the trigger finger with the finesse and speed required to shoot precisely at that speed.

You do not need massive levels of strength to shoot well. What you do need is to have enough strength to set the grip firmly without straining and then isolate the trigger finger without releasing your grip. The two middle fingers of the shooting hand do roughly 90 percent of the gripping action of that hand. Don't neglect the pinkie finger though.

You are conditioning not only the muscles, but also the tendons and soft tissue of the hand and arm. This takes quite a bit longer to do. Over time, both muscles and tendons will grow in strength and resistance to injury. You will not get "Popeye" forearms. You will get pure, functional strength and conditioning from a proper shooting grip strength program.

I would estimate that top male shooters have a grip strength of between 120 and 170 lb. on average. Curiously, the support hand tends to be stronger than the shooting hand in many shooters I have tested.

Using the tools

The key to developing a high level of grip strength is to use more resistance for fewer reps. Tennis balls, conventional grip devices, and other low-resistance exercises done for a lot of reps are not going to take you where you want to go. Remember, if you are already dry firing and live firing, you are getting a lot of gripping reps already.



Captains of Crush grippers – training program

These grippers come in varying resistance levels that go far beyond conventional grip tools. These are at the core of my shooting hand strength program.

The grippers are rated as follows with approximate poundage:

• Guide	60 lb.	• No. 2	195 lb.
• Sport	80 lb.	• No. 2.5	237.5 lb.
• Trainer	100 lb.	• No. 3	280 lb.
• Point Five	120 lb.	• No. 3.5	322.5 lb.
• No. 1	140 lb.	• No. 4	365 lb.
• No. 1.5	167.5 lb.		

Make sure you seat the grippers correctly in your hand. Use particular care not to let the coil sit down in your hand in the event the spring should break. One rep means going from a fully-open to a fully-closed position with the gripper. If you can't close it, you didn't do it.



Break-in program

For new to intermediate trainees – first 2 to 3 weeks:

Use the IronMind EGG to warm up your hand. Squeeze it 20–30 times with each hand.

Take two grippers, your choice.



Day 1

1st gripper 2 sets x 15 reps each hand (last few reps should just start to tire your hands)

2nd gripper 2 sets x 8–10 reps each hand (last 3 reps are hard)

Now use the Expand-Your-Hand Bands. Don't get crazy on trying to force reps and sets. Just take progressive bands and start with 15–20 reps, and then go slightly heavier for 10–15 reps. Two to 3 sets is plenty.

Evaluate how your hands feel for the next two days.

Day 2

If your hands feel good, repeat Day 1. If not, back off the heavy resistance and keep to a lighter program for more reps.

Do this program for 2 to 3 weeks and then you can launch into the following program.

Main workout – sample program

This program should be done twice a week.
Allow two days for recovery after the training day.

Use the Expand-Your-Hand Bands at the end of the workout to train the extensors as you did in the break-in program. Use the IronMind EGG to keep your hands supple on the off days.



Note: Try to do weight training after skills training. Your hands will thank you when you are shooting.

Use the appropriate level of resistance that is right for you. The models in parentheses are just examples, not absolutes. You are in charge of what feels right for you.

Warm-up (each hand)

- IronMind EGG x 20 reps
- CoC gripper: 1 set x 10–15 reps with very low resistance (Guide)



Workout (each hand) – rest as needed but not longer than 2 minutes between sets

- 1 set x 8–12 reps with moderate resistance (Sport)
- 1 set x 6–8 reps with moderately heavy resistance (Trainer)
- 1–2 sets x 4–5 reps with next level up (Trainer or No. 1)
- 1–3 sets x 1–3 reps with next level up (No. 1 or No. 1.5)
- 3 sets x 1 rep with heaviest one you can do



Index and middle fingers



Brush technique

Rest 3 to 5 minutes.

Take an IMTUG™ and hold it closed for 15–20 seconds while you manipulate your trigger finger as if you are shooting. Use the two middle fingers and brush the bottom with your little finger to hold it closed. Repeat with the other hand. Do it two more times for 60 seconds total.

For additional strength training on the main training days, you can use the IMTUGs to work the pinky and ring fingers at the end of your main workout. Turn it upside down for this exercise. Don't go crazy; just do 2–3 sets in the 5–8 rep range. You can also work some sets for your trigger finger individually with a lighter IMTUG.



Ring finger and pinky



Pinch grip for thumb



IMTUG™ two-finger grippers

The IMTUGs are designed to build shooting-specific finger and hand strength as well as strengthen individual fingers to allow you to increase overall hand strength. When doing exercises with the IMTUG, keep the trigger finger isolated unless you are specifically working it.

You can use the IMTUGs as a substitute for the Captains of Crush grippers, doing the same series you did on Day 1, or you can use them at the end of the workout for individual finger training and the isometric shooting exercise.

I really like the IMTUGs and I take mine everywhere I go.

IMTUG™



Note on training and shooting

You may want to do more training than twice a week. If you do, I would caution you to use care if you are already shooting and dry firing. You can easily go into over-training mode and your hands will stage a revolt shortly. More is definitely not better if you are training with proper intensity on training days.

Additional exercises

For pure pinch grip strength, you can also use the Titan's Telegraph Key™. This is a phenomenal piece of equipment. I think training the pinch grip helps me control the gun even more than using conventional grip tools.



For rotational arm strength, which I think helps with controlling recoil torque, the Wrist Reinforcer™ leverage device is superior to anything I have used in the past.



Starting out with light resistance, sit down and place your forearm flat on your thigh. Rotate the Wrist Reinforcer from side to side, slowly. Use your other hand as a catch in case it gets too heavy. Work a 180-degree arc of motion. Make sure you maintain control of the motion, particularly at the extreme ends.

As you gain strength in these exercises, you are going to notice that recoil feels "lighter" when you shoot. You will see a definite increase in the precision with which you are able to shoot at the same speed you were shooting before. This is good.

Conclusion

Remember, train lower reps, higher resistance and only twice a week, with two days off after a training day. Use the Expand-Your-Hand Bands at the end of each workout and the Green IronMind EGG on the off days to recover.

I am happy to report that I was able to increase the grip strength in my hands to between 165 and 195 lb. My splits are in the .12–.15 range, and on a good day I can do this speed out to 15 yards in practice with really good hits. What is really cool is how minimal the muzzle rise is when I shoot. After two and a half years, I have worked most of the bugs out of my new system of operating, and I don't feel as if I am giving up anything in terms of performance. I feel that I have increased my performance from what I was doing prior to surgery, and I know I can better it over time. The grip training was an integral part of the training program that helped me come back.

I know that grip training will work for everyone. Give yourself time to build strength and you will see the rewards in your shooting. Good luck in your training!

IronMind is the world leader in grip strength training, offering a full line of grip strength training tools and instructional materials as part of its "Tools of the Trade for Serious Strength Athletes™." Please visit the IronMind website for more information, and you are always welcome to contact us directly if you have a comment or question. We look forward to hearing from you.



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Firearms expert and professional shooter Ron Avery is the President and Director of Training at The Practical Shooting Academy, Inc., a school for scientifically-based, high-performance tactical and instructor firearm training.

A former police officer, Ron is an internationally recognized researcher, consultant, and trainer on firearms use. His weapons use and tactical training methods are used by a long list of top federal agencies, special operations/military units, and law enforcement departments throughout the country, as well as by many individuals. Ron's articles have appeared in many law enforcement publications, such as *PoliceOne.com*, *S.W.A.T.* magazine, *American Handgunner*, and *USPSA's Front Sight*.

Ron is a recognized world-class shooter and has competed in major tournaments in the U.S. and internationally for 36 years.

Ron has won many different titles and championships. He was a member of the U.S. Standard Team at the 2002 World Championships where he won a bronze medal individually and a gold medal for the U.S. Standard Team. Now competing as a senior, he has 15 individual Senior National Championship titles and is a top 10 competitor at age 59. He is currently ranked as a Grand Master in the USPSA open and limited divisions.

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