

Fitness

by Kelly Marshall BSc (Hons), Dip PT, NASM, SFS, IFS

ACTIVATE YOUR BUTT, PROTECT YOUR BACK!

Have you ever considered what percentage of your day you spend on your rear, either in a car, at a desk or on the couch? Our day-to-day demands tend to encourage too much time spent with the gluteus maximus, medius and minimus (butt muscles) in a relaxed state. This habit means that when we move and exercise we rely on smaller muscles, which can lead to injury.

The following exercises not only work to re-awaken your butt muscles and tone the whole of your legs, but also train the smaller structures, like the ligaments and tendons. This will improve your nervous system to better stabilise and protect your hip, knee and ankle joints.

1) Shoulder bridge

This exercise is a fantastic way to train your butt together with your core because it demands them to work together to stabilize your hips through the movement.

Firstly, lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Feet should face forwards and be relatively close to you butt.

Draw your belly button into your spine to activate your core and then clench your butt.

Keeping the squeeze in your gluts, lift your butt off the floor towards the ceiling until you make a straight line between your knees and shoulders.

Hold this position for 2seconds before slowly lowering yourself halfway down towards the floor.

As you lower, aim to keep your tummy in and your gluts squeezed! It may be quite challenging to start with but persist with it!

From the halfway position, repeat the above process. Try not to lower completely to the floor with each rep as you want to keep constant demand on these muscles, they can rest at the end of 15 repetitions.



2) Single leg toe touches

Research is showing that training in an unstable environment demands more from the body and yields greater results in terms of muscle tone, strength and injury prevention. As you will see this exercise is done on one leg... a surprisingly unstable environment!

Activate your core muscles using the drawing-in manoeuvre (LN2 # 9), then whilst in a standing position, lift one foot off the floor. Bend your knee and take your opposite hand down to touch the toe of the leg you are standing on, (if you are standing on your left foot, bend down and touch that foot with your right hand).

As you bend, you MUST ensure you load your weight backwards on to your heel, (as if going to sit on a chair), so your knee does not migrate forwards past your toes.

You should aim to bend the leg and squat down to touch your toes as opposed to just reaching with the arm and potentially, lower back. It is possible to cheat at this exercise but don't cheat yourself!

As you go from your squat to standing position, keep your bodyweight through your heel and squeeze your glut at the same time. At the top of the movement, squeeze your glut as tight as possible and tuck your butt under to complete the rep.

Aim to complete 10 reps on one leg, followed by the other leg. You may find you are very unstable to start with but this will improve quickly as you keep focusing on your tummy and glut throughout the movement.

When you feel your butt muscles burning it's a good sign!

IMPORTANT: if you start to get fatigue setting in through the foot and lower leg, then make sure you are not loading through the front of your foot! Sit back on that heel.

Aim to work up to 15 reps each side, with slow, controlled movement.

Exercise

Shoulder Bridge

How long/many?

Aim for 15 reps for two sets

How often?

Do these exercises together as a programme, 2-3 times a week, not on consecutive days

Single Leg Toe Touches

Start with 10 each leg, working up to 15 for two sets

Next time we'll focus on the arms and how to achieve and maintain muscle tone.