

Blast your *buttt*

► Pilates | By Jade Winter

Our increasingly sedentary lifestyle is causing our bodies to weaken, with important muscle groups growing lazy, says Jade Winter. Here are his ideas on how to address this

{ In a true case of ‘use it or lose it’, muscles that we don’t use become atrophied, growing weaker and hard to isolate or activate. Their function is slowly taken over by other muscle groups, creating muscle imbalances.

Pelvic stability, like core stability, is a term that is catching on quickly in the fitness industry, and essential to pelvic stability are the glutes or buttocks. However, these are also possibly the laziest of all

our muscles. This means we need to make them a priority in our training or we face annoying injuries and niggles until they are ‘fixed’.

Here’s another thought: do you get shin splints, tight ITBs, patello-femoral pain in the knee? It could be those glutes again, but how on earth can they cause shin splints?

The glutes consist of the gluteus maximus, gluteus minimus and gluteus

medius. When it comes to pelvic stability, the laziest of these is the gluteus medius. This runs from the top ridge at the back of the pelvis to the hip. The bulk of the muscle can be best felt just above the hip bone when you raise your leg out to the side or turn your knee out to the side. It also works – as mentioned in the test below – during the stability phase of standing. So by raising one leg out to the side while standing, you are working the glutes on

Take this test to see how your glutes stack up:

- Stand on one leg in front of a mirror.
- What happens to the rest of your body? Do you lose balance? Does the hip on your standing leg dip down, shift up, or stick out to one side?
- If you haven’t fallen over already, poke into the top corner of your butt, just under the belt-line. Can you feel any sort of muscle contraction happening in there?
- No problems so far? Then squat up and down a few times on the supporting leg. Now hop. Does your knee roll in or your ankle roll in, or – worse – do you lose balance? Can you feel those muscles working in the top corners of your butt?
- Now check the other side? Are you even or is one side weaker than the other?
- If you’ve answered yes to any of these, we need to talk more about your glutes.



Model: Tanya Winter

both sides – one in an active movement sense and one in a stability sense.

When your glutes are weak, other muscles such as your quads, ITB, hip flexors and even your lats can become overactive. And if you are running or cycling – both of which require muscular endurance – with weak glutes, you may end up with niggling back pain, knee pain, or shin splints.

That said, in most cases, everyone's glutes could do with strengthening. How? Perform these Pilates exercises at home every day and you should see results fast.

When performing these exercises:

- Ensure you feel into the top corners of your buttocks for the muscle contraction. Seek the advice of a physiotherapist or Pilates instructor if you are having trouble.
- Add a stretch band just above the knees if you need further challenge, or try a 1-2 kg ankle-weight.
- Draw your abdominals in towards your spine, and don't hunch your shoulders while exercising. Good posture is something we should always foster!

Lateral horse kick

Kneeling on all fours, extend one leg out behind you without dipping or arching your back. Keep your hips parallel to the floor, and turn the foot and leg outwards. Keeping your body still, exhale and slowly sweep the leg out to the side, maintaining its height and outward turn. Inhale and slowly draw it back to the centre. Repeat 20-50 times, then change sides.



The duck walk

Place a tied band around your ankles. Squat down and really stick your bottom out, keeping your feet straight, but turning your knees outwards. Maintain this leg and body position, and slowly walk forward – taking the largest steps you can – for 1-2 minutes.





Standing leg extension

Stand with a band tied around your ankles. Balance on one leg. Squeeze the buttock on your free leg and extend the leg backwards and away from the centre slightly. Do 50 slow pulses, then change legs.

Leg circles

Lie on your side with a band tied around your knees or just above. Extend your bottom arm and use it as a pillow for your head. Bend your knees, half in front and half behind. Roll your hips and body forward slightly, and keep them there. Extend your upper leg and circle it, keeping tension on the band the whole time. Do 25 circles one way and 25 the other, then change sides. This exercise can also be done without a band.



Pelvic curl and openings

Place a tied band around or just above your knees. Lie on your back, with your knees bent and your heels close to your buttocks. Slowly curl your vertebrae up off the floor one at a time, starting at your lower back, until your shoulders, hips and knees are in one straight line. Squeeze your buttocks without arching your back, and hold this position, then open and close your knees. Repeat 50 times, slowly. This exercise can also be done without a band.



Jade Winter

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