



BLAST YOUR BUTT

...and improve your running

By Katie Mackenzie of Studio Pilates International®

I hope you aren't too comfortable, as you won't be sitting for long after reading this article!

Our increasingly sedentary lifestyle is causing our bodies to get weaker and important muscle groups are becoming lazy.

In a true case of 'use it or lose it', muscles that we don't use atrophy, become hard to isolate or activate and have their function replaced by other muscle groups, therefore creating muscle imbalances.

One of the most commonly affected muscle groups is the glutes, or buttocks, essential in the maintenance of pelvic stability and prevention of injury. Glutes are possibly the laziest muscles we have, so we need to make them a priority in our training or we face annoying injuries and niggles until they are 'fixed'.

Pelvic stability, like core stability, is a term that is catching on quickly in the fitness industry.

It has been a well-kept secret that Pilates is one of the best forms of exercise to increase and target pelvic stability, and is something that is sought by athletes in the vast majority of sports.

Your glutes, in conjunction with a strong mid-section (abs and back), are the key to pelvic stability. However, not too many people actually understand how to develop that stability correctly. If you aren't training specifically, you could be worsening the muscle imbalance and find yourself out of action due to injury more often than not.

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? Or 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, then hop. Does your knee roll in, or does your ankle roll in, or worse, do you fall over and lose balance? Can you feel those muscles working in the top corners of your butt?
- Quick – 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. Even if you've answered no, you should continue reading

Do you get:

Shin splints, tight ITBs, patello-femoral pain in the knee?

Ever been told you have

poor biomechanics, or maltracking, when being fitted for running shoes?

Do you wear orthotics?

.....
Hmm, sounds like the glutes need some work.

So what are the glutes and why are they so important? And how on earth can they cause shin splints?

The glutes consist of 3 muscles - gluteus maximus, gluteus minimus and gluteus medius. Today, in the interests of understanding pelvic stability, we are going to concentrate on the most lazy muscle, the gluteus medius (or glute med, now that we are becoming experts on the topic).

The glute med 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 performing the active movements of hip abduction (raising leg out to side) or hip external rotation (turning the knee out to the side).

It also works, as mentioned during the test described above, during the stability phase of standing ie on the supporting hip when you are standing on one leg. So if you think about it, by raising one leg out to the side while you are standing, you are working both glutes – one in an active movement sense, and one in a stability sense.

When the glutes are weak, other muscles such as the quads, ITB, hip flexors and even the lats can become overactive. If you are performing an activity such as running or cycling, which requires muscular endurance, with weak glutes you might be familiar with niggling back pain, knee pain, or shin splints.

Everyone's body is different, so if you're unsure if your glutes are weak and if regular glute stability training can help you, it's recommended that you have an individual Pilates or physiotherapy assessment and diagnosis. In most cases everyone's glutes can do with some strengthening which should offer significant pain relief, improved performance, better posture and finally, a great body for summer.

Unsure of how to strengthen the glutes specifically?

Perform these 4 Pilates exercises at home, each day and you should see results quickly.

When performing these exercises:

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

CLAM

It's a good idea to start any of your glute work with this to activate and recruit the right muscles



Lie on your side with your knees bent, feet back in line with the body, knees in front of the body. Roll the top hip forward slightly and keep it forward, create a small space between your waist and the floor, feet up in the air. Squeeze the top buttock and slowly raise the top knee up towards the ceiling, keeping the feet together. Return the knee back to the starting position. Do 30 times each side.

“It has been a well-kept secret that Pilates is one of the best forms of exercise to increase and target pelvic stability, and is something that is sought by athletes in the vast majority of sports.”

CLAM KICKOUT

Increase the difficulty of the clam and make it a little more functional

1



2



3



Lie on your side with your knees bent, feet back in line with the body, knees in front of the body. Roll the top hip forward slightly and keep it forward, create a small space between your waist and the floor, feet up in the air. Squeeze the top buttock and slowly raise the top knee up towards the ceiling, keeping the feet together. Return the knee back to the starting position. Do 30 times each side. **DOES NOT HAVE KICKOUT INFO**

KNEELING SIDE KICK

A real killer and targets both glutes, one to raise the leg and the other to stabilise

1



2



Kneel on one knee, with the other leg held out straight and lifted to hip height. Place one hand on your hip and the other on the mat, about 60cm from your knee, so that your hand, head, hip and lifted leg are all in one straight line. Pulse the leg up and down, squeezing the buttock muscles Repeat 50 times with a 10-second hold at the end, then change sides.

***So – what are you waiting for?
Surely you aren't still sitting!***

***Get off your butt and start putting
in place those building blocks to
better performance, and reduced
injury time!***

KATIE MACKENZIE

Katie Mackenzie is a Studio Pilates International® Master Pilates Instructor and has a Bachelor in Physiotherapy from the University of Queensland. In addition to her passion for Pilates, Katie loves to run and has a number of marathons under her belt. Katie balances her time between her young family, her passion for doing and teaching Pilates with running at least 5 times a week. **UFM**

LEG CIRCLES

A functional exercise that can really work the glute if done correctly

1



2



need image

3



need image

Lying on your side with your underneath leg bent for support, extend the top leg straight. Keeping it straight, proceed to circle the leg in a slow controlled manner, avoiding any movement through the waist & torso. Do 30 in each direction