

Phase 3

GOOD FOR:

- Strengthening the core (back and abdominal muscles) and lower body
- Preventing low back pain and injury

GUIDELINES:

- Perform 3 or 4 days a week
- Do 3 sets of 10–15 reps unless otherwise noted
- Push sets to fatigue
- When there are multiple exercise options, choose a variation based on experience, fitness level, equipment availability, and personal preference
- Tools: resistance loop, bench, exercise ball, dumbbells

fire hydrant (choose one)

fire hydrant (bodyweight)

Get into the quadruped position with your shoulders aligned over your wrists and hips over your knees. Keeping your knee bent, raise one leg back and out to the side—like a dog peeing on a fire hydrant. Do not rotate your spine and move only as far as your hip will allow.



fire hydrant (banded)

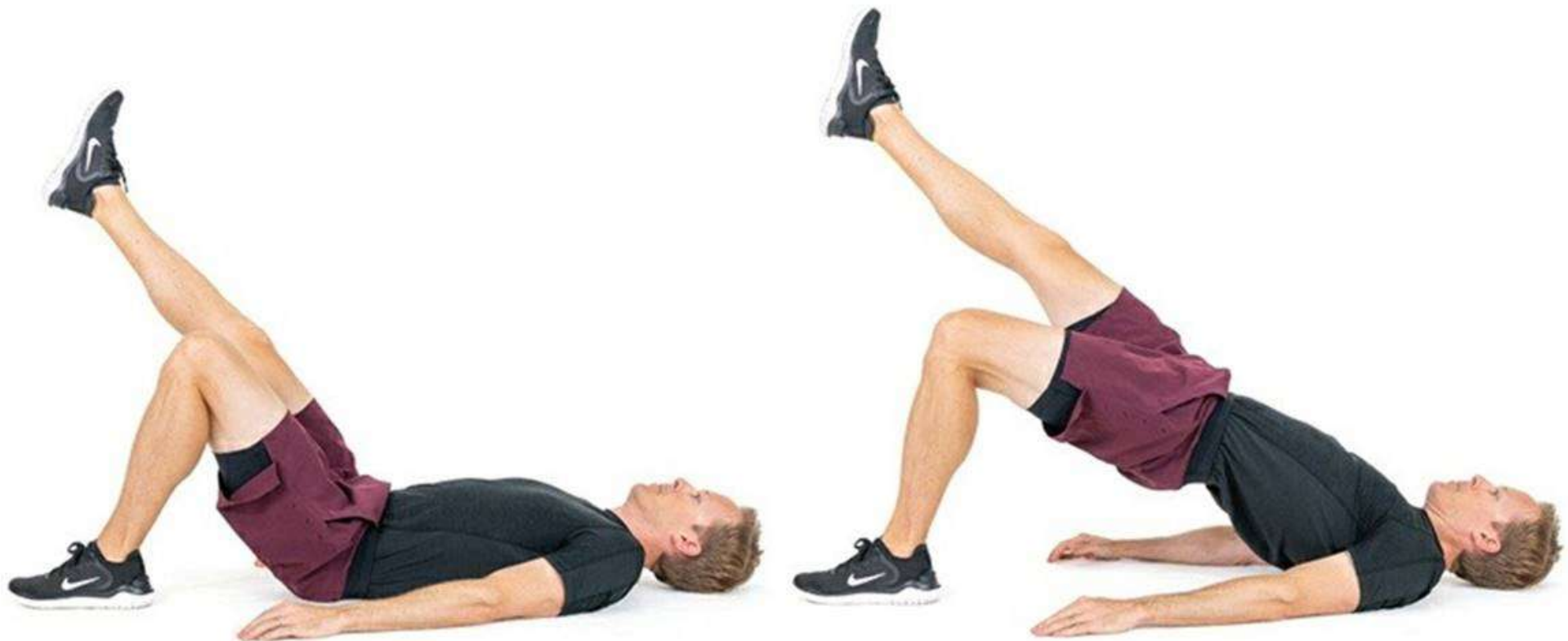
If the bodyweight variation is not challenging enough or you don't feel your glutes working, add a resistance loop above your knees to increase the resistance.



single-leg hip extension
(choose one)

single-leg hip extension (single-leg bridge)

Get into the bridge start position and elevate one leg—you can either straighten it or keep it bent at about 90 degrees. Push into the floor and extend your hips. Focus on squeezing your glutes as you reach full hip extension, holding the contraction for 1–2 seconds.



single-leg hip extension (single-leg hip thrust)

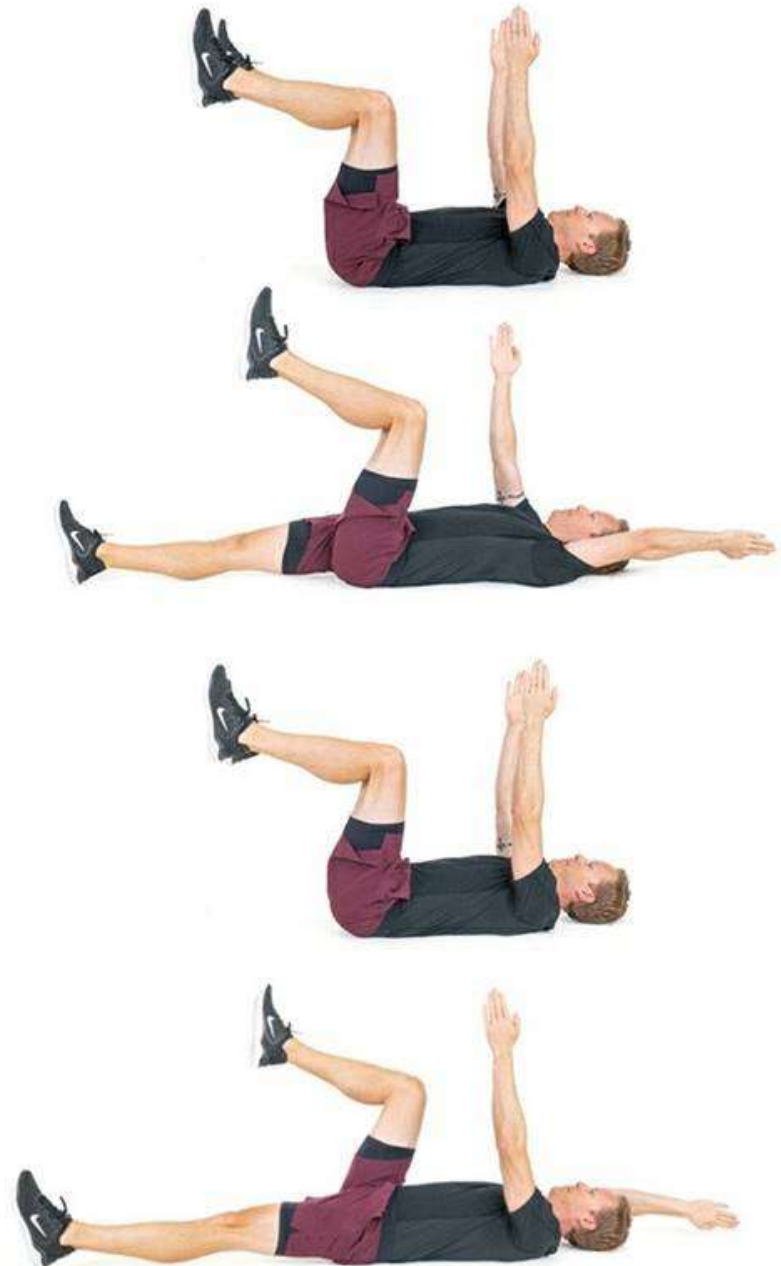
Position your mid-back on the edge of a bench and lift one leg—you can either straighten it or keep it bent at about 90 degrees. Push into the floor and extend your hips. Focus on squeezing your glutes as you reach full hip extension, holding the contraction for 1–2 seconds.



lumbar flexion (choose one)

lumbar flexion (dead bug)

Lie on your back, bend your knees and hips to about 90 degrees, and straighten your arms above your body. Extend one leg and reach overhead with the opposite arm while keeping your abs tight and your low back flat on the floor. Stop if your low back arches. Repeat on the opposite side. If this version is too hard, move only your legs.



lumbar flexion (abdominal rollout)

Start on your knees with your hands on a physio ball. Keeping your abs tight, roll forward until you reach full hip extension—form a straight line from your shoulders to your knees. If you arch, struggle to maintain a neutral spine, or feel pain, perform partial range of motion repetitions. Return to the start position by reversing the movement while maintaining the same form (flat back).



lateral flexion (choose one)

lateral flexion (side plank offset)

Lie on your side, position your elbow underneath your shoulder to elevate your upper body, and cross your top leg over your bottom leg. Use your trunk and core muscles to lift your hips. Perform 3 reps with 20- to 30- second holds.



lateral flexion (farmer's carry)

Hold a heavy dumbbell at your side. Walk 15–20 meters (or take 20–30 steps), keeping your spine straight (try not to lean to the side). Then turn around and return to the starting place. Do this 3 times on each arm.



lumbar extension (choose
one)

lumbar extension (bird dog)

Get into the quadruped position with your shoulders aligned over your wrists and hips over your knees. Extend one arm while extending the opposite leg. Keep your spine neutral and avoid arching your back during the movement. Repeat on the opposite arm and leg.



**Be careful with or skip the
skydiver, superman, and
extensor curl
if you have spondylolysis
or spondylolisthesis.**

lumbar extension (skydiver)

Lie on your stomach with your arms at your sides. Use your low back extensors to lift your lower and upper body segments off the floor. As you arch, squeeze your glutes and pull your shoulders back while maintaining a neutral neck position.



lumbar extension (superman)

Lie on your stomach with your arms reaching overhead. Use your low back extensors to lift your lower and upper body segments off the floor. Keep your neck neutral (don't look up), keep your arms straight, and squeeze your glutes as you elevate your legs.



lumbar extension (spinal extensor curl)

Position the physio ball under your stomach and push your feet into a wall while keeping your knees on the floor. Use your low back extensors to lift your chest, squeezing your glutes as you arch. Cross your arms over your chest to make the exercise easier, or place your hands on the back of your head to make it harder.



goblet squat

Stand with your feet roughly shoulder width apart. When it comes to foot flare, you can orient your feet straight or turn them out slightly—whichever feels better and allows you to reach the lowest depth without discomfort.

Cup the end of a dumbbell with both hands at the center of your chest. To perform the movement, reach your hips back slightly and sit straight down. As you lower into the bottom position, keep your spine in the neutral zone (not excessively arching or rounding), your knees aligned over your toes, and the weight close to your body. The goal is to keep your torso as upright as possible and lower as far as you can while maintaining good form.



box/chair squat

If you're new to squatting or have trouble controlling the movement, use a chair or box to gauge depth. Reverse the movement the moment your butt touches the chair; do not pause in the bottom position.



deadlift/rdl (choose one)

deadlift/rdl (dumbbell deadlift)

Hold dumbbells in front of your thighs with your palms facing your body, or with the dumbbells at a 45-degree angle relative to your body. Position your feet underneath your hips or just inside shoulder width. Keeping your back flat and arms relaxed, sit your hips back, bend your knees, and allow your torso to tilt forward (you should feel tension in your hips, hamstrings, and back). Keep the dumbbells close to your body (aligned over the centers of your feet), keep your shins as vertical as possible, and go as low as you can without rounding your back. To perform the upward movement, drive through your heels while extending your hips and knees.



deadlift/rdl (bodyweight (dowel) deadlift)

If the dumbbell deadlift is too challenging, perform the same hip hinge movement but hold a dowel instead of dumbbells.



deadlift/rdl (barbell deadlift)

If the dumbbell deadlift is too easy, do the barbell variation.



deadlift/rdl (single-leg deadlift)

You can implement the single-leg deadlift variation if the dumbbell deadlift is too easy or you want to improve neuromuscular control. Cup one end of a dumbbell with both hands and shift the majority of your weight onto one leg. In one motion, hinge from your hips and bend your loaded knee slightly. As you lower your torso and the weight toward the floor, keep your back flat, grounded shin vertical, arms relaxed, and shoulders and hips square (try not to twist or rotate).

