

How to Undo the Damage of Sitting - 7 Simple Exercises | The Art of Manliness

7 Simple Exercises That Undo the Damage of Sitting



If you're like most men living and working in a techno-service economy, you probably spend a good deal of your day sitting down. You go from the kitchen table to your desk at work to your chair in front of the TV. But [as we've discussed before](#), spending most of your waking hours planted on your keister is terrible for your health.

You've probably experienced those moments when you get up from a sitting position and your butt feels numb and your hips feel so tight that you have to lean forward at the waist just to walk. Excessive sitting leaves your hips and legs tight and your glutes inactive. Even after you stand up, the ill effects of sitting stay with you and may prevent your butt muscles from firing at an optimal level when you really need them – like when you suddenly need to [chase down a purse snatcher](#)!

Some fitness experts argue that sitting causes muscles in the hip area to physically shorten (and stay shorter), even after you stand up. While there are no scientific studies to back that claim, from my own personal experience, sitting for lengthy periods of time definitely makes everything feel tight in the groin/butt area.

If you're an athlete (or fancy yourself one), tight hips and inactive glutes can hamper physical performance in a variety of activities, such as sprinting, squatting, and — my favorite — deadlifting. If you want to perform at your best, you need to make sure that your hips stay limber and that your butt muscles are firing on all cylinders. Even if you're not interested in deadlifting 600 lbs. (though I hope to change your mind on that someday), keeping your hip flexors loose and glutes active can improve your life on other

fronts.

First, having limber hips just feels good, plain and simple. Second, having a healthy range of motion in your hips can help prevent injury when you pursue more recreational physical activities and do household chores. For example, loose hips keep your IT band loose as well, which can ward off knee pain. Finally, taking care of your hips may help improve your posture, which can in turn alleviate back or neck pain. (Not to mention the role of limber hips in doing a mean mambo.)

Below, we provide some simple stretches and exercises that will undo the damage to your hips and butt caused by sitting.

Prevention Is the Best Remedy: Sit Less and Move More

As the saying goes, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” The best thing you can do for your hip mobility and glute activation is to simply sit less and move more during the day.

If your employer will allow it, [try using a standing desk](#), which keeps your muscles activated at the office. Keep in mind that, just as with sitting, standing should be done in moderation (doing it for an extended period of time [isn't that great for you, either](#)).

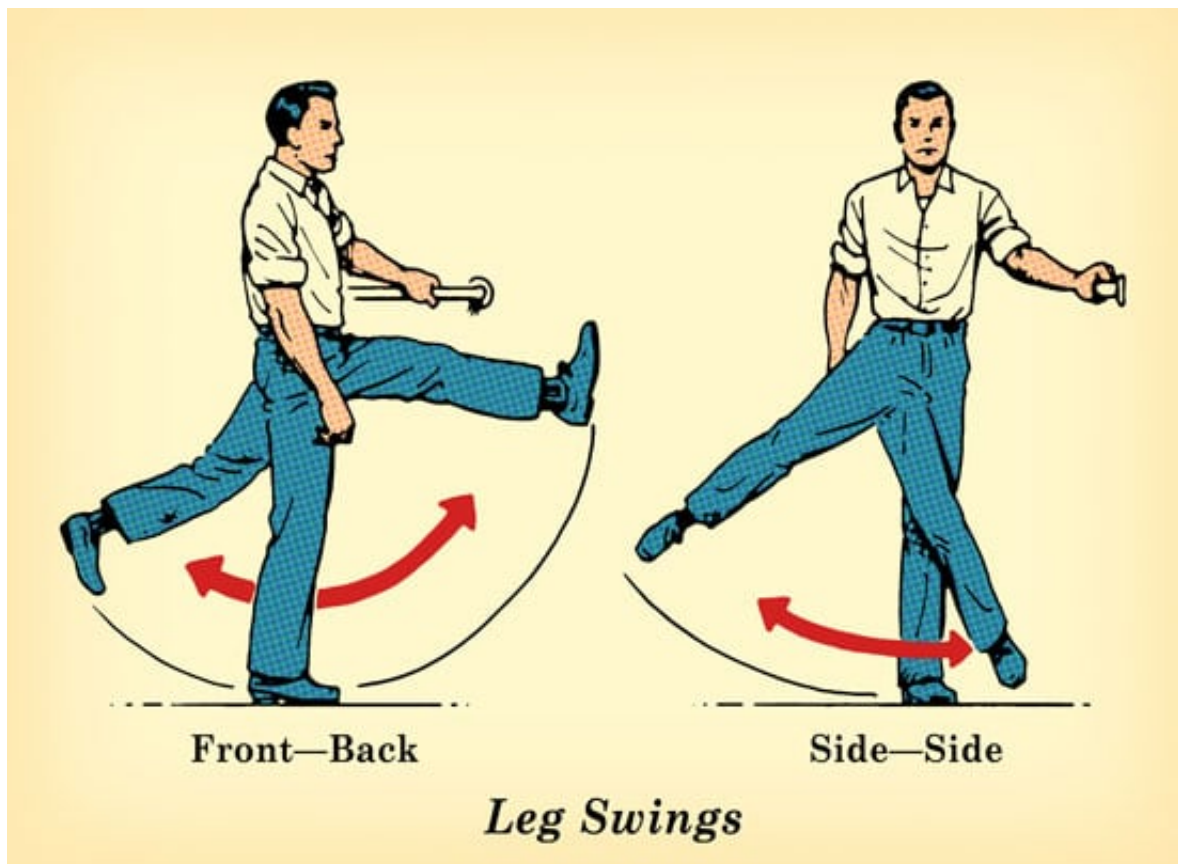
If a standing desk isn't an option, take five-minute breaks from sitting every 30 to 45 minutes. Stand up and walk around a bit. Maybe even perform a few of the exercises below. Even if you have a standing desk, you should still take breaks every now and then for some movement.

Stretch Out Those Hips

These dynamic stretches and exercises are designed for loosening tight hips that come from sitting too much. I try to incorporate a few of them in my daily workout warm-ups or even sneak some in when I'm hanging out with the kids (who think their dad is pretty odd). Every now and then I also dedicate an hour on Saturdays to just hip and glute work, along with [some intense foam rolling](#).

If you're really tight, take it nice and easy. As [physical therapist Kelly Starrett](#) says, “Don't go into the pain cave. Your animal totem won't be there to help you.”

Leg Swings

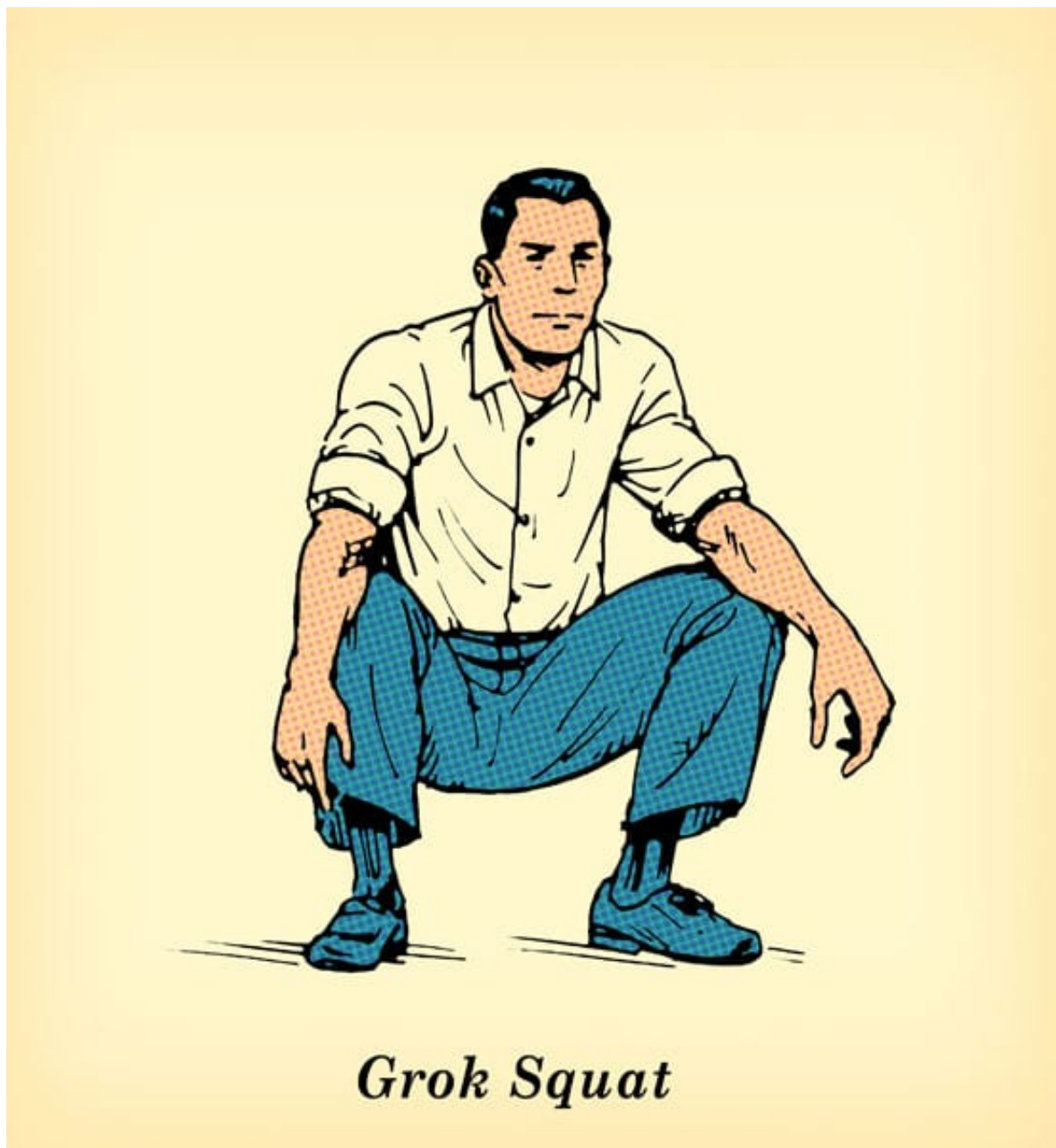


This is a great dynamic stretch that I do before every workout. It loosens up the hips, hamstrings, and glutes.

Begin with forward leg swings. Find something to hold for balance. Start off swinging your right leg backwards and forwards as high and as far back as you comfortably can. Do 20 swings and then switch legs.

Next are side-to-side swings. Again, find something to hold for balance. Swing your right leg out to the side as high as possible and then in front of you towards your left as far as you can go. Perform 20 swings and then switch legs. Depending on how tight you feel, you may need another set.

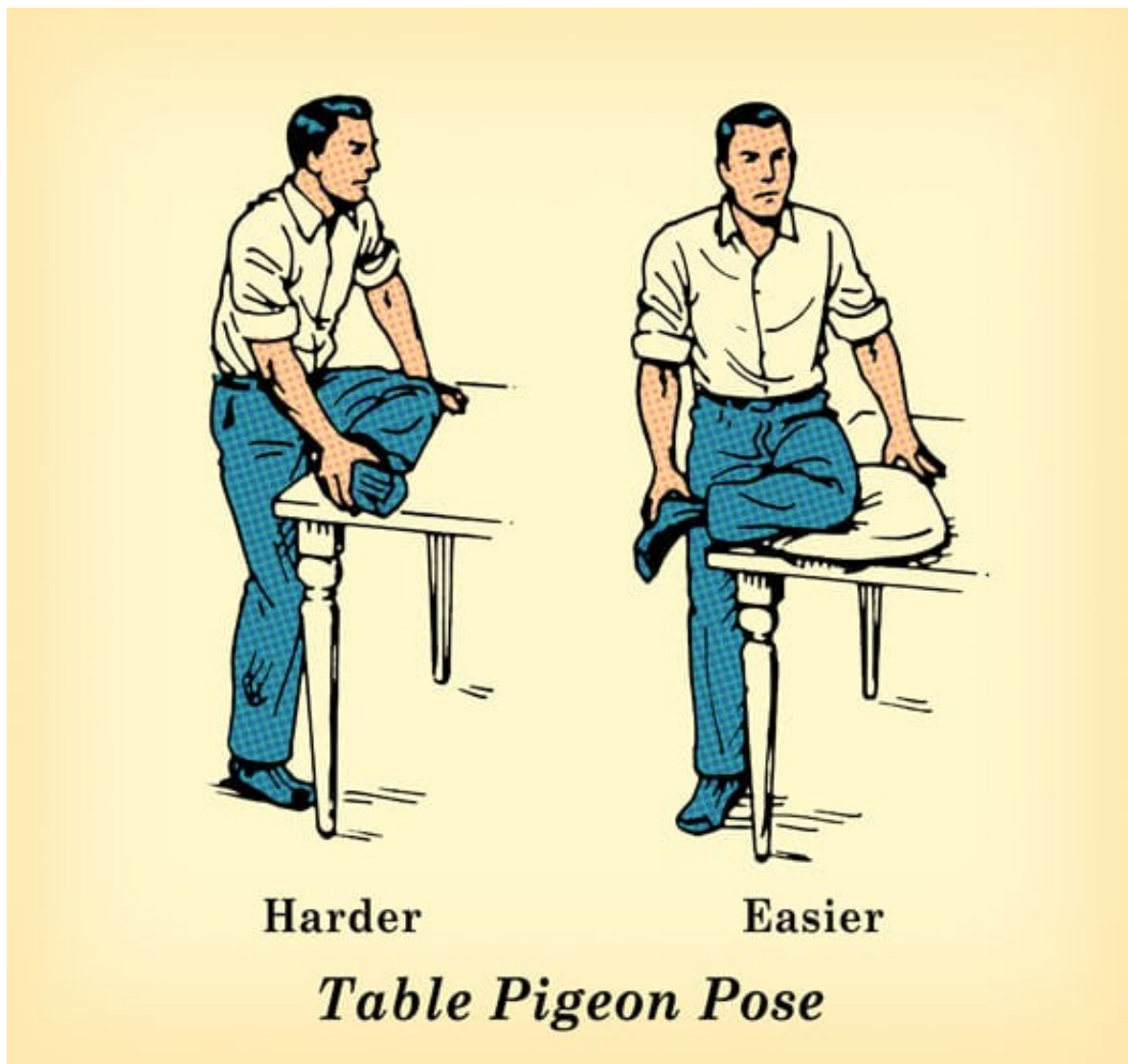
Grok Squat



The Grok Squat is very similar to a catcher's stance in baseball. Simply squat down until your butt touches your ankles. Keep your heels firmly on the ground and your back straight. Hold that position for 30-60 seconds. You should feel your hamstrings, quads, Achilles tendons, lower back, and groin gently stretching. If you're super stiff, it may take a few days of practice to sink into a full squat. Keep at it. Your back and hips will thank you.

Intersperse a few short squatting sessions into your daily routine.

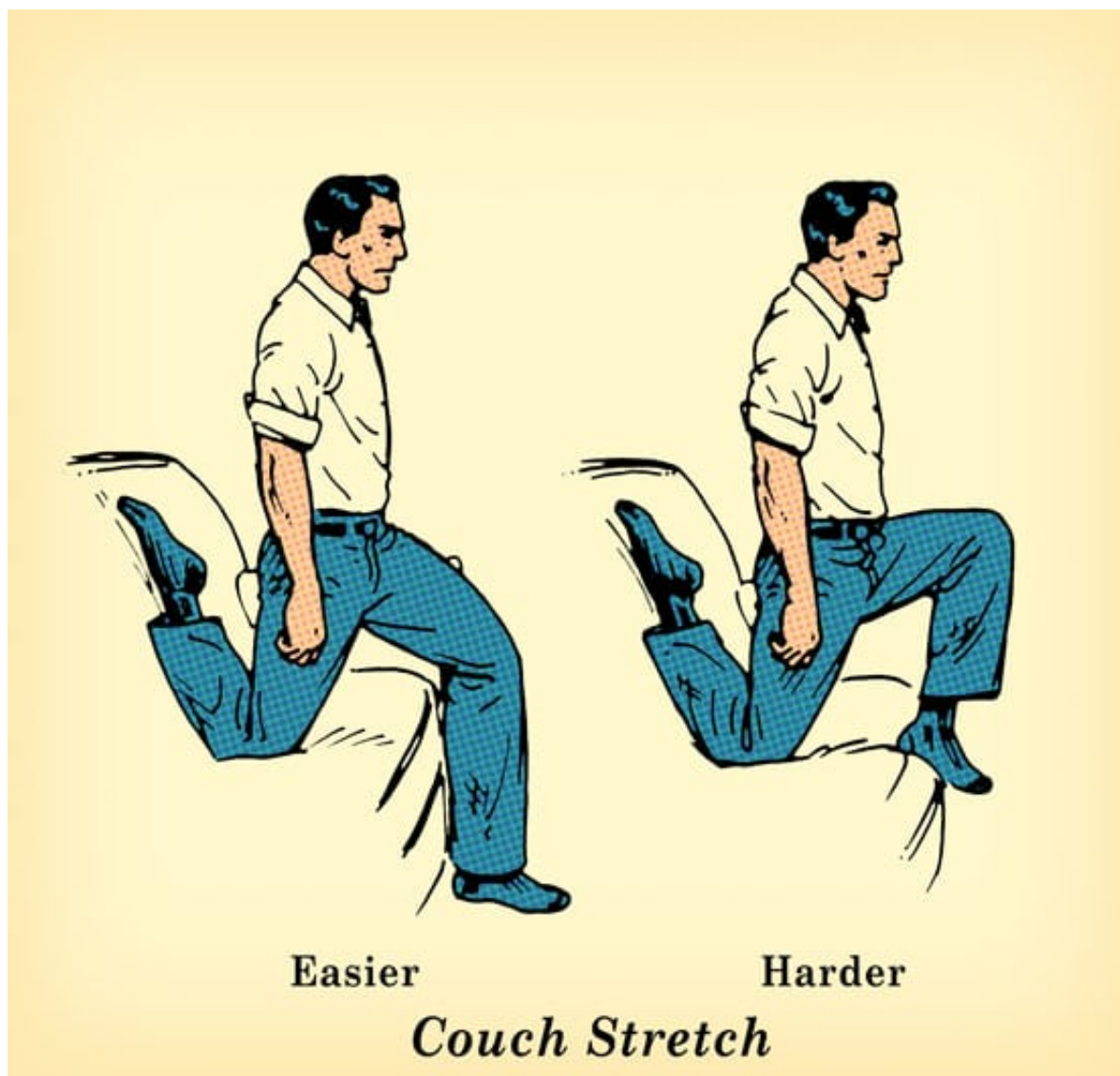
Table Pigeon Pose



If you've done yoga, you're probably familiar with the pigeon pose. This stretch is the same thing, except you use a table, which makes it a bit easier to perform and allows you to stretch out your muscles from different angles. Start by placing your leg on a tabletop (you could also use your bed) with the knee bent at 90 degrees. Place one hand on the table and one hand on your foot for support. Lean forward and hold for 60-90 seconds. Then lean left to the 10 o'clock position and hold for 60-90 seconds. Lean right to the 2 o'clock position and hold for 60-90 seconds. Repeat on the other leg.

If you have knee problems, rotate your body so that your ankle hangs off the table and place a pillow underneath your knee. Aim to do two pigeon poses a day (I personally do one during my workout and another at a random time).

Couch Stretch



This stretch is a killer. I didn't realize how unlimber I was until I tried doing the couch stretch. It's basically a quad stretch ratcheted up a few notches. Starrett argues that this will undo years of sitting.

You actually don't need a couch for this stretch, it just makes it a bit more comfortable (if that's even possible). You can also do it on the floor by putting your knee against a wall.

For the "easy" version, place the knee of the leg you're stretching against the back of your sofa. Place the foot of your other leg on the floor. Slowly raise your torso to a neutral spine position (i.e. standing straight and tall). As you raise your torso, squeeze your butt and abs. Hold the position for up to four minutes. Switch and repeat on the other leg. You should feel things really stretch in your hip flexor area — just don't push yourself too hard.

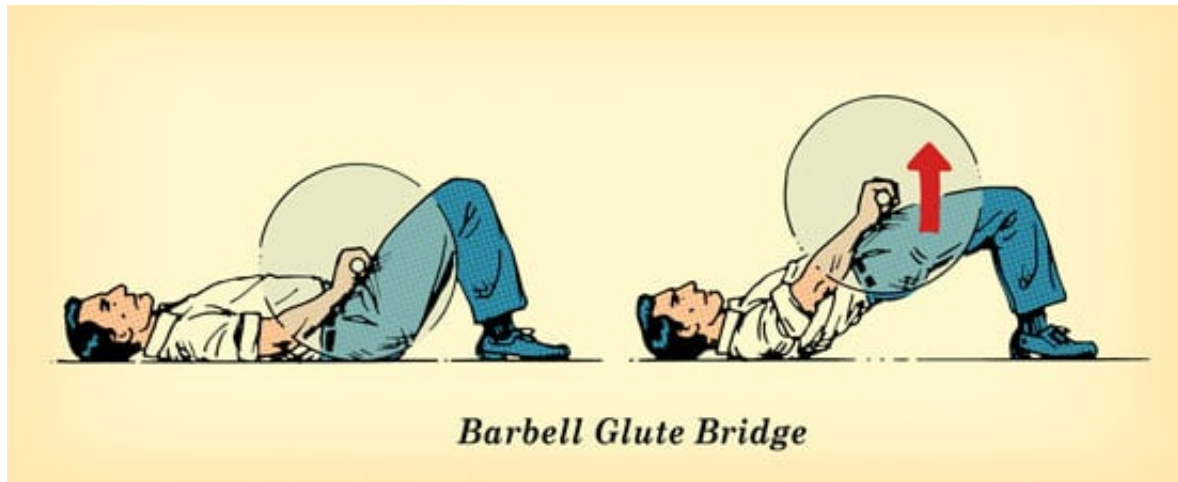
To up the ante, bring your non-stretching leg up onto the seat of the couch. Keeping a straight, neutral spine, squeeze the butt and abs and work your way up to holding the position for four minutes. Keep in mind that it may be awhile before you can get your torso to a straight position. When I first started doing this stretch the "hard way," I could only raise my torso to a 45-degree angle and I'd have to support myself with my hand on

the floor. I was eventually able to move to a straight position after two weeks of dedicated stretching. The difference in the mobility of my hips was (and continues to be) significant.

This stretch is so good that I try to do it every day, sometimes before a workout, sometimes when I'm just hanging out while Gus watches *Paw Patrol*.

Activate Those Glutes

Barbell Bridges



This is another exercise that makes you look goofy but does wonders for your glutes and hips. It has been a great support exercise for the deadlift.

Lay on the ground with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Put a padded barbell across your hips and grab it with an overhand grip about shoulder-width apart. Raise your waist off the ground while squeezing your glutes until your hips are aligned with your body. Return to the starting position, and complete three sets of 10 reps.

Aim to do this exercise one to two times a week. You can add weight as you get stronger. If you can't do it with the weight of the barbell, try un-weighted bridges.

Clamshells

Fair warning: You're going to feel a bit ridiculous doing this exercise. But it's one of the best for activating your glutes. If you're self-conscious, do this at home before you go to the gym so no one sees you.



Lay on your right side with your hips and knees bent at 45 degrees. Yes, you're going to look like a middle school girl at a slumber party who's talking about who she's crushing on. Don't worry. Your deadlift will thank you later.



Keeping your feet together, raise your upper knee as high as you can without moving your

pelvis. Don't allow your lower leg to move off the floor. You've suddenly transformed from middle school girl to 1970s Burt Reynolds posing in the buff. Pause, then return to a starting position. Do 20 reps on one side and then repeat on the other side. Perform three sets one to two times a week.

Fire Hydrants

Hey, look! Another glute activation exercise that makes you look goofy! It's called the fire hydrant because you're going to mimic how a dog pees on a fire hydrant. For real.



Get down on your hands and knees with your palms flat on the floor and your arms shoulder-width apart. (Your knees should be about hip-width apart.) You see me here harnessing my totem labrador retriever.



Maintain a straight, neutral spine and slowly raise your right leg out to the side as high as you can while keeping it bent, just like a dog would. As you can see from my face, this is harder than you'd think it would be. Really feel it in the ol' butt cheek and hips. Lower and repeat 15 times. Repeat with the other leg. Do two to three sets once or twice a week.



For added glute activation, extend your leg straight after you've lifted it up.

I learned these moves from a few sources: [Becoming the Supple Leopard](#) by physical therapist Kelly Starrett, paleo guru Mark Sisson of [Mark's Daily Apple](#), and weightlifter Medhi from [Stronglifts](#). If you're looking to increase not only your hip mobility, but your all-around limberness, Starrett's book and [website](#) are especially helpful.

Illustrations by [Ted Slampyak](#)

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