

Want to Know How to Loosen Your Tight Hip Muscles?

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Sitting for long periods can cause your hip flexors to shorten up and become tight, leading to problems with posture and back pain
- › Exercises that target your hip muscles will help to open your hips to build flexibility, reduce pain and prevent injuries
- › Hip exercises and stretches may help reduce patellofemoral pain (PFP) and iliotibial (IT) band syndrome

In the course of a typical workout, many people neglect to include exercises that focus on building hip strength. Yet, this is extremely important, as weak hip muscles can set off a cascade of negative changes in your mobility. If your hip muscles are weak, you may experience poor hip motion.

In turn, this may lead to pain in your hips, knees and back. There are several primary muscles in your hips that deserve strengthening. Your gluteus maximus (which is on the back of your hip or buttocks) and the gluteus medius, which is the primary muscle on the side of your hip, are two of them.

Your hip flexors — the rectus femoris and the iliopsoas — should also be tended to, especially if you sit at a desk for long hours.

Sitting for long periods can cause your hip flexors to shorten up and become tight, leading to problems with posture and back pain. In addition, weak hip flexors may

contribute to foot, ankle and knee injuries.^{1,2}

How to Loosen Tight Hip Muscles

Sitting is a primary culprit in tight hips and thighs because the muscles are rarely extended (although they may also become tight from working out). To lengthen and strengthen these muscles, try this move created by Suzanne Bowen, creator of BarreAmped, an internationally taught barre technique chosen by Fitness Magazine and Natural Health Magazine as the best barre workouts in 2015.³

You'll need a chair or kitchen counter for support. Start out in a kneeling lunge position with your right foot in front and leg bent at the knee in a 90-degree angle. Your left knee should be a few inches behind your left hip. To do the exercise, Bowen recommends:⁴

"1. Press forward a few inches into your right leg just until you feel a gentle stretch in the opposite hip.

If you have very tight hips, this might be as far as you go. (Protect the front knee by making sure it doesn't extend out beyond the toes.) For a more advanced stretch, straighten the left leg behind you and then press forward.

2. When you're ready to move on, reposition the rear leg as needed so you can stretch your right leg straight out in front of you. Keep your back straight and lean a few inches forward from the hips and feel the stretch in the right hamstring."

Hold each position for two to five deep breaths, then switch sides.

8 More Stretches for Tight Hips

The stretches that follow, compiled by lifestyle media publisher POPSUGAR, will help to open your hips to build flexibility, reduce pain and prevent injuries. Athletes and dancers

commonly stretch their hips for optimum performance, but virtually everyone, including desk workers, can benefit immensely.⁵

1. Happy Baby (opens your hips)

- Begin lying flat on your back. Bend both knees and hold the outside edges of your flexed feet with your hands. Keep your arms on the outsides of your legs.
- Gently use your upper body strength to equally press both knees to the floor below your armpits. Try not to tense your shoulders or chest, but keep everything relaxed.
- Stay here for five deep breaths.

2. Extended Wide Squat (stretches both hips at once)

- Stand with your feet slightly wider than your hips. Bend your knees and lower your hips down toward the ground. If your heels don't touch the ground, roll up a towel or the back of your mat and place it under your heels for support.
- Bring your palms together at your heart center and firmly press your elbows against the inside of your knees. This will help to open your hips even further.
- After five breaths, release the hands to the floor and walk them away from your feet to increase the stretch in the hips and lower back. Hold for another five breaths.

3. Open Lizard (for hip flexors and outer hips)

- Come into a lunge position with your right knee forward. Lower your left knee to the floor and rest your hands on the ground under your shoulders.
- Slowly lower your right knee to the right so you're resting on the outside of your right flexed foot. Keep your arms straight, pressing your chest forward to increase the stretch.
- Hold like this for five breaths and then repeat on the left side.

4. Wide-Legged Split (stretches your hips, hamstrings and inner thighs)

- From Wide Squat, place your hands on the floor in front of you and inch your feet apart, making sure to keep your heels wider than your toes. Keep the soles of your feet flat on the ground to protect your knees.
- As your hips get lower, you can prop yourself up with your forearms and then move down to your shoulders. If your shoulders are on the ground, turn your head to the side and rest your cheek on the ground so you don't bruise your chin.
- Stay here for five deep breaths, then walk your feet back together.

5. Butterfly (stretches both hips at once)

- Sit on the ground, bend both knees and bring your feet together. Using your hands, open your feet up like a book. Use your leg muscles to press your knees down toward the floor.
- Lengthen your spine, drawing your belly button inward. Relax your shoulders and gaze either in front of you or toward your feet. Stay here for five breaths, and then slowly fold forward, drawing your torso toward your legs. Remember to try to keep your spine straight.
- Rest your hands on your feet, pressing your knees down with your arms, or if you want more of a stretch, extend your arms out in front of you. Stay here for another five breaths.

6. Head to Knee (for hips and hamstrings)

- Sit on the ground with your legs out in front of you. Bend your right knee and pull the sole of your foot against your left inner thigh.
- Sitting with a tall spine, reach both hands to your left foot and stack your torso on top of your left thigh. If you can't reach your hands to your foot, rest your hands on your shin or knee. Try not to round your back.

- Stay here for at least five breaths, relaxing your shoulders away from your ears. Then do the other side.

7. Pigeon (opens your knees one at a time)

- Sit with your right knee bent and your left leg extended behind you. Pull the right heel in toward your left hip, or if your hips are more open, inch your right foot away from you.

Make sure your left hip is always pointing down toward the mat. If it begins to open up toward the ceiling, draw your right foot back in toward your body.

- Stay here with your hands resting on your right thigh or your hips, or walk your hands out in front of you, allowing your torso to rest over your right knee. Hold here, breathing into any areas of tightness and tension for at least five breaths.
- Repeat this pose with the left knee bent.

8. Double Pigeon (an intense stretch for your glutes)

- Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Bend your left knee, and place your knee, shin and foot on the floor so they're parallel with your pelvis.

Bend your right knee, and place it on top so your knees, shins and ankles are stacked. You'll know you're doing it right when you gaze down and see that your legs make a little triangle.

- You may find your top knee to be high up toward the ceiling. It's OK, it just means that your hips are tight, so just stay where you are and breathe.
- To make this pose more intense, place your hands in front of your shins and walk them out as far as you can, folding your chest toward your legs.
- Stay here for five breaths, slowly release and then switch legs so your left knee is on top.

Improve Hip Mobility in 2 to 5 Minutes a Day

Your hip joint is a ball-and-socket joint that needs regular movement to keep in top working condition. If you're mostly sedentary, your hip health and mobility can quickly suffer.

In the video above, BJ Gaddour, director of Men's Health Fitness, demonstrates a sequence of hip exercises to improve mobility by moving your hips through their full range of motion. If you spend a few minutes doing these every day, you'll experience stronger, more flexible hips.

Hip Exercises May Reduce Knee Pain

Pain, at one point in your body, may originate from problems occurring elsewhere. In the case of knee pain, the problem may actually start in your hips. For instance, patellofemoral pain syndrome (PFP), which frequently occurs in runners, occurs when your thigh bone starts rubbing against the back of your knee cap while running.

According to a pilot study, this type of pain can be reduced or even eliminated simply by strengthening your hips. Participants took part in a hip-strengthening program done twice weekly for six weeks, with major improvements in pain levels. Indiana University motion analysis expert Tracy Dierks, Ph.D., explained:⁶

"The results indicate that the strengthening intervention was successful in reducing pain, which corresponded to improved mechanics ...

The leg was going through more motion, suggesting that the (pain) guarding mechanism was reduced, and coordination or control of many of these peak or maximum angles in the leg were improved in that they were getting closer to occurring at the same time."

Stretches to Relieve Iliotibial (IT) Band Syndrome

Your IT band runs along the outside of your leg, and attaches at your hip and just below and on the outside of your knee. It helps stabilize your knee joint during movement.

One of the most common sports injuries, especially among runners, is IT band syndrome, which occurs when this ligament becomes tight and/or inflamed. Tight muscles in your hips can be a major contributing factor. When your IT band is tight, just about any kind of knee movement can become painful as the IT band is pulling your knee out of alignment. Stretches that can help prevent this condition include:

- **Cross-legged stretch** – Standing on the floor, hook your left foot behind the right. Bending forward at the waist, and pressing your left big toe down into the floor, twist your body slightly to the left while holding on to your right leg with your hands.

Done correctly, you'll feel your IT band stretching on the outside of your right leg. Hold the stretch for a moment, then uncross your legs and repeat on the other side.

- **Wall stretch** – Stand about an arm's length from the wall. Step forward with your left leg and backward with your right. Bend your left knee, pressing down on your right heel. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then switch legs.

A foam roller can also be used. Below is a quick Runner's World video demonstrating a simple foam roller exercise to loosen your IT band.

Increasing Range of Motion in Your Hips Is Crucial

In the elderly, decreased hip mobility is a leading cause of falls, making regular hip exercises crucial to maintaining your independence and health. The exercises that follow will help strengthen your hips and improve flexibility – even people with hip osteoarthritis can benefit. For a demonstration, please see the video above, created by CTC Healthcare.

Flexibility Exercises for Hips

Single knee hugging – Lying on your back, grab your right knee and pull it toward your chest until you feel a stretch. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat on the left side.

Bilateral knee hugging – Lying on your back, grab both knees and pull them toward your chest. Hold for 20 seconds.

"Cobra pose" – Lie face down on the floor, hands parallel to your shoulders. Straighten your arms, lifting your upper torso off the floor. Your lower back should be arched, with your pelvis making contact with the floor. Hold for 20 seconds, then lower yourself back down.

Hip flexion with abduction/adduction – Lying on your back, bring one knee up toward your chest. Holding your knee with both hands, roll your knee from one side to the other for 20 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

External hip rotation – Lying on your back, pull your right knee toward your chest. Place your right hand on the knee and your left hand on the ankle. Gently pull your right ankle in the direction of your head. Hold for 30 seconds, then repeat on your left leg.

Internal hip rotation – Lying face down, bend your knees 90 degrees and let your feet fall outward. Hold for 30 seconds.

Strengthening Exercises for Hips

- **"The Clam"** – Lie on your side, feet together and knees slightly bent. Raise your top knee as far as you can, then lower back down. Repeat 15 times, then switch to the other side.
- **Bridging** – Lying on your back, with your feet flat on the floor, raise your hips toward the ceiling. Pause for a few seconds before lowering back down. Repeat five times.

- **Knee pivots** – Lie on your side, feet together and knees slightly bent. Raise your top knee and foot. Holding your knee in a raised position, pivot your foot up and down. Repeat 15 times, then switch to the other side.
- **Heel pivots** – Lie on your side, feet together and knees slightly bent. Raise your top knee and foot. Holding your foot in a stationary position in the air, pivot your knee up and down. Repeat 15 times, then switch to the other side.

Sources and References

- ¹ [Greatist December 15, 2011](#)
- ² [Clin J Sport Med. 2005 Jan;15\(1\):14-21](#)
- ^{3, 4} [Los Angeles Times January 9, 2016](#)
- ⁵ [Pop Sugar April 17, 2016](#)
- ⁶ [Indiana University News](#)