

Leg Days: 3 Must-Do Exercises for your Lower Body

Exercise #1: This is a great exercise to work on improving balance on the trail as well as strengthening ALL the muscles in your legs and hips.

1. Start with feet hip-width apart, hands at hips. Step back to a lunge with your right leg while keeping most of your weight on your front foot (left heel) and keeping your left knee over your left ankle. Keep your back tall and core tight.
2. Press through your left heel as you step up to balance on the left foot and bring your right knee up in front of you at hip height. Make sure your left leg does all the work, not your back.
3. Extend your right leg straight out in front of you until you get a good flex in the quads. Keep your back straight and abs drawn in as you extend the leg.
4. Step back again with the right leg and repeat the exercise 10 times before switching to do 10 on the other leg.



Exercise #2: The WoodPecker

This is a great exercise from Foundation Training because it strengthens your glutes while they are also being lengthened. It is great for hip stability and relieving back pain. You should feel the exercise in your glutes and hamstrings primarily, with just a bit of work in your back (especially as you extend your arms in front and up). I do this exercise regularly during a trail run or hike so that I can get both sides of my hips working equally up the hill.

1. Stand in a lunge or split stance with your right foot forward. Make sure your feet are hip width apart (you are not standing on a tightrope). 90 percent of your weight is on your right (front) heel and your right knee is above or slightly behind the ankle. Your left (back) heel is lifted high. Lengthen your spine and tighten your core. Pull your chest up and your chin back. Place your hands at the crease of your hips so you will have a good idea of where the movement comes from.
2. As you press your weight into the right (front) heel and keep it there, hinge your hips back as you let your straight spine and chest hinge forward (like you are looking out over a cliff). Your weight always stays in your right heel and your hips do not rotate or open to the side.
3. Scoop your hands together and out in front of your chest. Maintain the weight in your right heel, straight spine, square hips, and feel your glutes hold you in place. Take 3-5 deep breathes as you hold this position.
4. Extend your arms higher overhead as your body maintains all other positions and your glutes are now burning with effort. Take another 3-5 deep breathes in this position. Keep your chest up and chin back so your neck does not strain.
5. Switch legs and do the other side. Just one set on each side should do the trick.



Exercise #3: If you haven't heard it already, you should know that your gluteus medius (muscle on the outside of your hip joint) is a very important muscle for hip stability, knee stability, and overall movement health. This exercise is a great way to simply strengthen those glute meds.

1. Wrap a band around your ankles, or calves. You can buy a band like this one for about \$5 online. Stand tall with a straight spine, level shoulders, and engaged core. Keep just a soft bend in your knees.
2. Step to the side with your left foot while maintaining level hips and shoulders. As you press against the band, you should think about pressing with your heel, not your toes. Keep your feet pointed straight ahead. Do five steps to the left and then five steps to the right for a total of 60 seconds and you should start to feel the burn.
3. Avoid the common mistake of allowing your hips to tip and tilt or allowing your shoulders to tip. As you step sideways (looking in a mirror), your hips and everything above them should just glide sideways without any other motion. Your shoulders stay level, your spine stays vertical, and your hips stay level.



Angie Kelley is the owner of FitFix Personal Training in Bozeman, MT. She has a degree in Exercise Science, masters studies in Exercise Adherence, is certified through NASM-CPT, and holds several other specialty certifications. She has been a trainer for over 20 years and also teaches classes such as cycling, strength training, Zumba, kickboxing, Sprint, and HIIT. She is a certified Foundation Training instructor and uses this practice a lot with clients to improve their athletic performance and decrease back pain. Angie loves to hike and run the local trails around Bozeman with friends or her loyal 4-legged companion, Pompey (in pictures). You can find her on Facebook (FitFix Personal Training) or email: angiefkelley@gmail.com