



BODY MIND YOGA
PERTH

The Buttocks/Glutes

The glutes are the muscles which make up the buttocks. They primarily consist of gluteus maximus, gluteus medius and gluteus minimus. Another important muscle in the buttocks is the piriformis. This is a particularly significant muscle to release because the sciatic nerve runs underneath or through this muscle and if it is tight it may cause sciatic pain. Other smaller buttock muscles include the obturators and superior and inferior gemellus.

To keep it simple, the principle actions of the glutes are to extend the thigh, rotate the thigh laterally and to abduct the thigh. The glutes hold the body in an upright position and play a big role in walking.

Keeping these muscles strong is important as they can help to support the lower back and improve posture. However if they are too tight this can cause problems too – such as sciatica, lower back pain and knee problems. So when working with toning the glutes it's useful to also stretch them.

Always build up strength gradually. Move slowly and with awareness. Don't push into pain. And remember to breathe with the movements.

At first, when you are developing strength, its best to start by moving in and out of the pose – doing only a few repetitions (working the muscle dynamically). But then once the exercise becomes easier, you can hold the position and breathe (working the muscle statically). Then to work the muscle further you can hold the position and pulse.

Practice sequence

Warm ups from semi supine

These exercises gently release the spine, hips and glutes in preparation for the stronger stretches and strengthening exercises.

1. Knees side to side: Lie on your back, with the legs in semi supine (feet flat on the floor and shoulder width apart). Slowly take the knees side to side – breath out to the side and into the centre.

2. Spine release: Place the hands behind the head. Breathe out and draw one knee over the chest as you lift the head up – gently tighten the abdominal muscles to bring the head and knee toward each other; inhale back down and then swap knees....alternate from side to side a few more times.

- 3. Gentle sciatic, hamstring and glutes release:** Keep the left leg in semi supine and have the right knee over the chest and hold under the knee with the right hand. Slide the left hand behind the head. Breathe out gently straighten the right leg toward the ceiling as you lift the head; breathe in back down. Repeat a few more times and then swap sides.
- 4. Circle knees over chest:** have both knees over the chest and hold onto them with the hands. Slowly guide them in circles, first one way and then back the other way. This releases the lower back and gently stretches out the glutes.

Specifically targeting the glutes – supine position

- 1. Shoulder Bridge (setu bandha sarvangasana)** this pose strengthens gluteus maximus. Have the feet flat on the floor and about hip width apart with your arms down beside you with the palms facing downward. Breathe in as you press into the floor with the feet to lift the hips up; then breathe out down. By specifically focusing on pressing into the floor with the heels you will feel the glutes working.
- 2. Apanasana** - this is the counterpose to shoulder bridge and releases the lower back and stretches the glutes. Have the knees over the chest and as you breathe out use the hands to slowly draw the knees into the chest and as you breathe in let them move away from the chest.
- 3. Pilates on the side:** Great for strengthening gluteus medius and minimus. Lie on your left side with the legs long. Make sure your neck is as comfortable as possible –so you might want to have the left hand under the head. Have the right hand on the floor in front of you for support. Make sure the legs are in a straight line with the rest of the body. Breathe in and lift the right leg up, so the foot moves in the direction of the ceiling and keep the leg comfortably straight and have the toes slightly pointing down toward the floor; then exhale down. When that becomes easy, you can hold the leg up where you can feel the muscles working the most and keeping it up pulse the leg slightly up and slightly down.
- 4. Release:** still on the left side with the left leg long, but bend the right knee and rest it on the floor in front of you. Use the right hand in a fist and pummel around the buttocks as you breathe. Repeat on the other side.
- 5. Take knees side to side** a few times.

Standing

- 1. Warrior pose 1 (Virabhadrasana):** this both strengthens and stretches gluteus minimus and medius. Stand with the feet wide apart so the front foot points forward and the back foot angled out about 45 degrees. Have the hips facing forward. Breathe in and bend the front knee (do this slowly and carefully and don't push into any pain with the knee) as you float the arms up toward the ceiling. Breathe out as you straighten the leg and bring the arms down. Repeat a few times before swapping sides.

- 2. Chair pose (Utkasana):** this pose strengthens gluteus minimus and medius and stretches gluteus maximus. Again be careful with the knees only bending them as far as is comfortable – with NO pain. Stand with your feet close together and as you breathe in float the arms up to the ceiling; breathe out and bend the knees and gently arch the back, so the chest moves forward slightly and your leaning forward from the waist a little. Inhale as you bring the body upright and exhale as you bring the arms down. This is also a great pose for strengthening the knees but take care with them – don't bend too much if you have knee problems.
- 3. Hang forward from the waist,** bending the knees as much as you feel to, and breathe. This gently stretches the glutes, hamstrings and lower back.
- 4. Advanced: Half moon pose (Ardha Chandrasana):** this pose is excellent for strengthening all the glutes. The strong balancing aspect of the pose also engages the other core muscles (abdominals). Once this pose becomes easier you can hold the position and pulse the back leg up and down as you breathe to work the muscles more strongly.
To practice: stand with your feet together. Shift your weight onto your right foot. Breathe out and bend forward from the waist to place your right palm on the floor with the arm straight (bend your knees if necessary). Breathe in and lift your left leg toward the ceiling so it is parallel to the floor. Rotate your torso to the left and extend your left arm toward the ceiling. Both arms should be perpendicular to the floor. If this is easy and your neck is fine, then you can turn you head to look up at your left hand. Breathe out and bring the arm and leg down and then inhale up to standing and repeat on the other side.

On the front

- 1. Locust (Salabhasana):** this strengthens gluteus maximus. Lie on your front with the legs hip width apart and arms out long in front of you. Breathe in and lift one arm and the opposite leg off the floor. Also lift the head slightly, but keep your face looking down at the floor so the neck is safe. Exhale down and swap sides. Alternate sides a few times and if that is easy then do both legs and both arms together. When that is easy you can hold the position and breathe.
- 2. Plank:** this strengthens the abdominals and glutes. Lie on your front, resting on the elbows and forearms with the elbows under the shoulders (sphinx position). Breathe out slowly tuck you chin in and roll your head down the midline of your body, so your abdominal muscles tighten and your pelvis lifts off the floor (the pressure comes onto your knees). Then breathe in and rest the pelvis down and lift the head up so you are looking forward again. If that is easy then tuck you toes under and as you roll down lift your pelvis and knees off the floor so you resting on your toes and elbows in the full plank position – feel the tightness in the abdominals and buttocks. Once that becomes easy, hold there and breathe.
- 3. Rest in child position:** from a kneeling position, lean forward from the waist and rest your forehead on the floor or on your hands. The arms can either be stretched out in front on the floor or resting beside your body. Watch the breath here.

Sitting

- 1. Butterfly (Baddha Konasana):** this pose works the piriformis, obturators and gemellus and can also help to release the gluteus medius and minimus. Sit up comfortably straight and have the soles of your feet together with the knees wide apart. Hold onto the feet and as you breathe out lean forward from the waist, keeping the spine fairly straight; breathe in back up.
- 2. Seated spinal twist (Ardha Matsyendrasana):** This is a great stretch for all the glutes but specifically targets the piriformis, obturators and gemellus. Sit with the left leg crossed (so the knee is bent and the foot is near the right buttock) and place the right foot on the floor to the outside of the left knee (so the right knee points up to the ceiling). Place the right hand on the floor behind you and have the spine comfortably straight and turned slightly to the right. Wrap the left arm around the right knee to gently draw the knee in toward the chest – hold here and breathe easily. Then swap sides.
- 3. Seated forward bend (Pashimottanasana):** another great stretch for all the glutes. Sit up tall with the legs straight out in front. As you breathe out slide your hands down your legs and lean forward from the waist and bring your chest down toward the thighs. You can bend the knees as much as you feel to here; inhale back up. When you are comfortable with the pose you can hold and breathe.

Rest: lie down on your back in a comfortable position and watch your breath. Breathe in and let the belly expand; breathe out and feel your whole body relax. 5 minutes.

References

1. "Yoga Anatomy" by Leslie Kaminoff. 2007 Human Kinetics.
2. Yoga Journal volume 1846 "Glute Camp" by Alisa Bauman.
3. "Yoga Therapy" by A. G. Mohan and Indra Mohan. 2004 Shambala Publications.