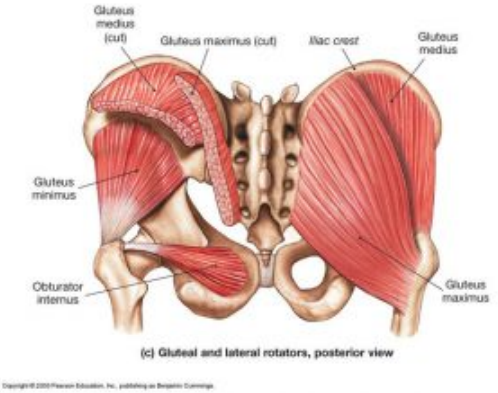
Train your glutes, do you have buns of steel?

Article by Jim Burke, Aug 2014

Ensuring you train your glutes an important part of any exercise regime and with their anatomical location, it should not be any surprise that poor gluteal (butt) strength or control can play a role in a variety of injuries. Often overlooked in the management of lower limb, pelvis and back injuries, the gluteal muscles play a pivotal role in ensuring smooth control of the leg during weight bearing movement, as well as in holding the pelvis firmly onto the leg, providing a stable base for the muscles of the pelvis and low back to work from. If the glutes are not functioning well, your back, hips knees and ankles better watch out! If there is any doubt, next time you watch sport, particularly those involving explosive power, take a look at the size of the athletes butt, your glutes really are the engine room for any lower limb movement.



(c) Gluteal and lateral rotators, posterior view

Most of us have heard of and know of gluteus maximus, the big muscle on the top of the butt but this is only one part of the story. There are 3 layers of gluteal muscle all which play an important and varying role in controlling movement. As a general rule in the body, the more superficial muscles are more involved in generating torque to provide movement in the body and the deeper layers (like your core muscles) tend to play more of a gripping, stability role, stiffening the bones of the joint to provide a stable foundation for movement to occur on. The top layer of the butt muscles, the big gluteus maximus is a powerful muscle that predominantly works to assist in extending the hip to generate movement. The middle layer, gluteus medius plays a mixed stability and torque producing role and the deeper layer, the gluteus minimus plays much more of a gripping, stability role in the hip.

There are a number of reasons that the gluteal muscles may stop working well and become weak. Poor standing postures are a common cause of weak glutes. When we stand in sway or prop off one hip, we hang off the joint and allow the butt muscles to switch off and become weak. Poor biomechanics and movement can shift the work from the glutes to other muscle groups either as a result of or as a contributor to developing weak glutes. The sad truth is that the human body is really designed for movement and as we get older, most of us tend to sit on our butt more than using it, resulting in a decrease in strength and control of the muscles. Often as a result of injury such as low back pain or injury to the leg, the brain will inhibit or switch off the gluteal muscles, changing the way we move and causing them to become weak.

There are a huge range of exercises which can be used to work the gluteal muscles, each of which may target a slightly different layer of muscle. There is not one right or wrong exercise for everyone and in the case of healthy, gluteal muscles which are recruiting well, they should be able to be worked effectively across a variety of exercises. When there has been some inhibition or weakness of the glutes, the body tends to cheat by overusing other muscles, often resulting in pain or injury. When this happens, it is important to note that there is no magic bullet exercise that will automatically turn the weak or underactive muscle back on. Generally a range of exercises need to be trialled of increasing load and intensity to gradually get the muscle working again in a range of tasks and positions. If you can't get your glutes to work in a relatively simple static position, it is more than likely that that they will be working even more poorly with walking, running or jumping, you really do have to crawl before you can walk.

You may have heard of the term 'functional exercise' which physios have been using for a long time but which has started to

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find its way more and more into mainstream training. Essentially this term refers to exercises that replicate the normal day to day 'functional' movements that the body and muscles are designed to be performing. The later stages of any rehab program for the glutes should always be functional weight bearing movements, as these are the types of movements that will most likely get your butt working again during the sports and daily activities that resulted in pain and injury in the first place.

It is important to note that when working the glutes, the main place that you should be hurting is in the glutes!! If you are feeling pain elsewhere, particularly at the site of an injury, the exercise is either too high level or just not right for you and you should consult your physio for some advice on a suitable training program. Below if a list of a few common mat exercises as well as functional weight bearing exercises for the gluts that you can try at home or in the gym

How To Train Your Gluts At Home

	**SIDE LEG LIFT:** Lie on your side with the top leg held out parallel to the floor. The bottom leg can be bent or straight. With the deep abdominals engaged lift the top leg up to work your side buttock muscle then lower to parallel to the floor Repeat x 20
GLUTE MED AT WALL: To train your glutes, stand side on to a wall on the right leg with the left knee resting on the wall, as shown. Poke the butt backwards as if sitting into a chair and bring the hips and shoulders away from the wall. Push into the wall with the left knee without moving the pelvis or spine. Hold 6 seconds. Repeat 10-12 times Progress the exercise by longer holds or performing small knee bends on the standing leg keeping the hip, knee cap and in line with 2nd toe as shown in the picture.	
 	**LUNGE:** Take a step forwards and keep your weight over the front foot. Perform a small lunge, poking the butt backwards as if sitting into a chair. Allow the back heel to lift and keep the front kneecap line with the second toe Return to the start position by pressing through the front heel to activate the inside quadriceps and gluteals. Repeat 12 times on one leg, then change to the other side and do 3 sets each side

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