

THE ULTIMATE GLUTE CHALLENGE

MASTER METABOLISM & BOOST PERFORMANCE



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A BETTER BUTT A STRONGER CORE

Tell me what hurts, and I'll tell you that the solution isn't always obvious. It may not be your knees. It may not be your lower back. It may not be weak abs. It is almost always your butt.

8 REASONS YOU WANT A BETTER BUTT (BEYOND YOUR REARVIEW)

Buns, peach, bum... whatever you call it, we all seem to be a little junior high when it comes to a better butt. Is it just me? That's where it started for me. Junior high when the painter's pants and the rugby and Izod shirts were all the rage... climbing the stairs to the next class or back to your locker, you both craved and hated the embarrassment of hearing, "nice butt," from behind. (pun intended)

Fashion and fitness pictures of both men and women in bathing suits feature a significant area of the butt exposed. Butt-enhancing underwear is actually a thing. Fitness tights often feature back seams so tight they lift, separate, and in my opinion are plain uncomfortable. We like butts. There I said it. This, however, is much more than a J-lo trend. Human movement demands a certain level of function from our butt muscles. If they can't deliver, we're closer to stress or injury at joints or muscles above or below our bums.

For women especially, with the larger Q-angle (wider hips and causing more angular hip to knee relationship), a weak bum can be a contributing factor to knee issues. To better understand the muscles in your bum read on. To jump right to suggested exercises for your

In this eguide:

What are the butt muscles?

Why you want a better butt after 50/What are signs you may have weak glutes?

Should you isolate or integrate for glute activation?

What does and doesn't activate the glutes?

If you have limited time to focus on just glutes, how do you spend it?

The Butt Muscles

Also known collectively as "glutes," your butt muscles are the Gluteus Maximums, Gluteus Minimus, and Gluteus Medius. The gluteus maximus is the largest muscle in the human body. It is also by nature the laziest. Because it takes up a lot of real estate in your skeletal muscle, that's a waste of good metabolism right there. The "glute med" as the cool kids call it is one that gives a lot of midlife women issues; avoidable issues with proactive training changes. The glute minimus is one we talk less about, and I'll discuss why that's true.

Glute Minimus

It is a hip stabilizer and abductor, that is, helps you move your leg away from your midline. As you sidestep using a band around your knees, or in the water, you employ that gluteus minimus. If you're resisting against adduction (or moving the leg to the midline of your body) or rotating your hip inward, you also use it. Basically, it's working all the time in movements and in stabilization. It just doesn't get a lot of attention for it!

For that reason, the Gluteus Minimus deserves its 5 minutes of fame for all the silent work behind the scenes!

Integrate or Isolate?

While I don't advocate isolation exercises for busy women of any age, especially those who have more susceptibility to adrenal and cortisol issues, sometimes it's the country road you have to take to get to the interstate. That is, if we give you a total body workout inclusive of exercises that you can't do optimally because of weak or lazy muscles, then we may set up for injury does not result. You may have been there. You hopped into a program without a body in good alignment and did everything you were told, and found you're injured not fit.

So, in this post I explore the on ramp to optimal glutes and in case you've got lower back or knee issues, you may want to add a little extra credit to workouts you're already doing. Or if a little "nice butt" comment directed your way would be welcome... there's that too.

Why you want a better butt:

- 1) Reduce risk of back injury
- 2) Reduce risk of hamstring pulls
- 3) Reduced stress on knees and ant cruciate ligament and patellofemoral issues
- 4) More power in push off (walking/running) which improves gait speed
- 5) Improved ability to climb... stairs or mountains
- 6) Boosted metabolism 24/7
- 7) Prevent ITB syndrome
- 8) Improved blood sugar stabilization

Yes... and look better in your jeans.

Nothing wrong with that. My mom at 87, not a vain woman, wanted "some exercises to help with this" as she patted her belly. At that moment I fully embraced the idea that we may always be motivated first by what we look like and how that makes us feel. So, whatever motivates us, no judgment, you get the health benefits too.

Exercises that build a better butt best:

Some traditional exercises DO work the glutes, they rely on them. But if you're dominant in another muscle group or are using a position that favors something else, you may not be maximizing the

glutes (see what I did there?) Squats, for example; if the weight of your body is a little more on your forefoot, you'll be emphasizing quads rather than glutes. If you keep your weight shifted back into heels, your emphasis will be more glute focused.

In a lunge, when the torso is slightly more forward yet, weight on the heel, and you've got a weight coming toward the floor close to the forefoot, the set-up is intended to emphasize the glutes. However, not everybody is able to accomplish this without weight going to the forefoot which will place pressure on knee and shift weight to the quadriceps.

Here's why that's true. And why, it doesn't mean you're doing anything wrong. Every individual's bone is slightly different. The distance from your hip to knee and the distance from your knee to ankle and the unique combination of the two, in addition to any limitation from previous injury or scar tissue, might mean you're unable to get into a position that enables the firing of glutes without compromise somewhere else. We each have a unique risk: reward ratio we must assess to decide if a move is good or not for us. That may be a right now decision or a forever decision.

Exercises that are less effective but used first and frequently:

Clams are go-to exercises. I was surprised to find that the exercises I was given by a physical therapist for a high ham pull (due to tight hip flexors and weak glutes) 15 years ago, are not on the top of the list for muscle recruitment.

Don't get me wrong, clams are there. But if we want to start with higher muscle recruitment, we're going to be more inclusive of other exercises.

Squats (and leg press), lunges, and deadlifts can be less effective if the glutes aren't as strong as they need to be. There will be "cheating." Of these only lunges or deadlifts if done with are truly gluteus exercises that will tap into the Gluteus Medius, which is often THE glute muscle that needs some tutoring.

Deadlifts, frankly, make me nervous. They're trending at the gym right now. They are potentially very good, yet, without a strong lower body that moves functionally well first, I find that many are loading heavily without a good foundation.

Exercises you may need to do first if you have gluteal amnesia:

- Butt squeeze
- Isolate "turn on, turn off"
- Single leg balance (and yoga poses count)

P.S. Gluteal Amnesia is "cute" and memorable. But truly your glutes are activating if you're able to get out of a chair, of course. Yet, if you've got the knee, the lower back, or the slow speed in your walk, you may not be getting all the activation of Gluteus Medius- often the underlying issue in hip issues like piriformis syndrome or bursitis. We may need to "deactivate" something over-firing to let the glutes strengthen and do their share.

DEADLIFTS FOR GLUTES? WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Single vs Double leg Deadlift

SINGLE LEG Deadlifts provide more activation of Glute MED and biceps femoris than Double (or bilateral) Deadlifts.

With deadlifts, I recommend single leg limited range of motion for the purpose of focus on strength at the origin of the hamstrings and the Gluteus Medius.

Are you more petite or vertically challenged?

The single leg deadlift may be even more effective than if you're "tall." This was believed to be based on the reduced need for knee flexion in subjects with less height. Optimal knee flexion is 30 degrees for force of the biceps femoris. Taller subjects may have had to have greater flexion in the way this was performed in the study.

Reduce the hinge at the hip for safety of the lower back and increased focus on the Gluteus Medius would make knee flexion less of a factor regardless of height. The goal is not more flexion forward with the torso, it's about 30 degrees forward torso – or hip hinge – to full extension where the Glute Medius is fully engaged. More isn't better, in fact may contribute to more issues with hamstring origin. (That is, high hamstring strain).

THE WINNERS OF THE GLUTE ACTIVATION AWARD:

Gluteus Medius (most to least)

1. Side plank abduction with dominant leg on bottom
2. Side plank abduction with dominant leg on top
3. Side clam progression 4 (straighter leg)
4. Front plank with hip extension

Gluteus Maximus (most to least)

1. Front plank with hip extension*
2. Gluteal squeeze
3. Side plank abduction with dominant leg on top*

4. Side plank abduction with dominant leg on bottom*
5. Single limb squat *

These starred exercises* produced over 70% activation in **both Gluteus Medius and Gluteus Maximus**. So, it's safe to say, these are multitasking exercises for development of the glutes collectively. Remember that gluteus minimus is worked with each exercise so although not specifically mentioned in the exercise reviews, it will also be functioning for you in these exercises!

HOW TO USE THESE WORKOUT BUNDLES

Starting from scratch? You haven't been doing much for your glutes at all, you've had a history of hamstring pulls, lower back issues, or knee pain or tenderness? Use the **Better ButtStarter** for a couple weeks.

If you're also already doing a total body strength routine, just slip this into your week. These exercises can be done 4-7 days a week if you'll make the time. Unlike a total body workout with sets and repetitions you want to take you to or very near temporary fatigue, these are intended to wake up lazy glutes. You should feel the glutes, but you'll not feel complete overload. You're still doing this correctly!

Aim for 3 sets of 10-12 repetitions. Start with 1 of each, move up to 2 of each, then finally 3 over a couple of weeks, or until you're no longer feeling like this is enough stimulation. The exercises are easy, and you are feeling the glutes not only during the exercises but in other daily activities of life or exercises. For instance, if you're performing squats or leg press regularly, you should notice that more muscles are engaged as you do the exercise. That's a good sign.

The **Even Better Butt Bundle** is your next step.

For this set, you'll continue to do some of the exercises from the starter pack with a little more difficulty. If you're unable to do them (because of another joint limiter, return to the starter pack version you know you can do.

Remember, if you feel you've mastered all but one of two of the starter pack, you can still go on to this layer, just include the exercises that are still challenging for you.

Do these for about two weeks, aiming still for 4-7 days a week. Do 3 sets of each 10-12 of each. You are working on activation of lazy muscles, and not necessarily are you going to reach "temporary fatigue." That's okay. The variety of exercises is important here so that you get all three glute muscles firing for you.

After 4 weeks, one or two each of starter and even better sets, and more even better sets, pick the exercises from these bundles that still challenge and keep those in your routine 2-4 times a week. You can do them as warm up or cool down from a strength day, or on alternate days. You may want to choose based on your weakness.

Knee issues may indicate that you want to focus on exercises that most support your neglected Gluteus Medius:

- Side plank abduction
- Seated band abduction

Lower back or hamstring pulls may indicate you want to focus on the gluteus maximus and hamstrings connection:

- Front plank with hip abduction
- Single leg squats

Make a note here if you want to focus on one or the other of these: _____

Better Butt Starter:

Standing one-legged balance
Hip circumduction (leg circles from)

- a. standing
- b. back lying
- c. side lying

Quadruped – hip extension
Glute Squeeze

- a. seated
- b. lying
- c. bridging

Side clams

- a. bent
- b. straighter

Wall Squat (more max than mid)

Better Butt Starter							
	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Standing one-legged balance	xxx		xxx			xxx	
Leg circles standing	xxx		xxx			xxx	
<u>Leg circles supine</u>							
<u>Leg circles side lying/side lying lift</u>							
Quadruped hip extension (forearm plank with hip extension but on palms)	xxx		xxx			xxx	
Glute squeeze seated	xxx		xxx			xxx	
<u>Glute squeeze lying</u>							
<u>Glute squeeze bridging</u>							
Side clams bent	xxx		xxx			xxx	
<u>Side clams straighter</u>							
Wall sit (up to 1:00 = set)	xxx		xxx			xxx	

Instructions:

Each x = one set of 10-12 repetitions

If 3 seems too much to start, begin with 1 or 2, progressing to 3 when ready.

Once you've achieved the exercises try one of the variations below bolded exercise instead. (Not both. You'll complete the same number of exercises/sets, just changing to vary or progress the difficulty).

These can be done most days or just 3 days a week. Ideally, they are spread out but there is no harm in completing these two days in a row.

Complete for 1-2 weeks depending on difficulty for you. As you go on to other/additional exercises, you can continue to include any here that seem especially challenging for you.

Even Better Butt Bundle:

Front plank with hip extension

- a. plank from floor (forearms are best, no difference for glutes from palms)
- b. Variation: can be done from a ball to incorporate core stability

Side plank abduction with dominant leg on top

- a. on elbow, knees 60-degree flexion
- b. Lift and open as wide as possible

Single leg squat

Even Better Butt Bundle							
	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
<u>Front Plank hip extension (forearm or hands)</u> <u>Straight or 90-degree knee</u>	xxx		xxx			xxx	
<u>Front plank hip extension from ball</u>							
<u>Side Plank on elbow knees 60 degrees</u>	xxx		xxx			xxx	
<u>Side Plank on elbow lift & open as wide as possible</u>							
Single leg squat	xxx		xxx			xxx	
<u>Glute hyper machine/counter/ or bench/ball</u>							
Any Ex from Starter:							
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Instructions:

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These can be done most days or just 3 days a week. Ideally, they are spread out but there is no harm in completing these two days in a row.

Complete for 1-2 weeks depending on difficulty for you. As you go on to other/additional exercises, you can continue to include any here that seem especially challenging for you.

Even More Better Butt Exercises:

Newer research explored more exercises for the combined benefit to the Gluteus Medius and Gluteus Maximus and found some surprises. The traditional clams are not top glute activators. Don't discount them entirely though. Try them first. If they're a challenge or you limited range of motion, stick with the starter bundle and progress when you can easily do 3 sets of each with good form and without feeling undue soreness.

These 3 exercises (I know it looks like 4, but there's 1 that's allowing you to double dip!) were the winners for overall stimulation of glutes.

These are also the most difficult and each may present an obstacle for some exercisers. Don't attempt an exercise if you can't do it with good form.

- #1 Front Plank with Hip extension
- #2 Side-Plank with hip abduction (up leg)
- #3 Side-Plank with hip abduction (down leg)
- #4 Single leg squat

Short on Time? When you're ready for targeted glute activation try these 3 or 4 days a week and work up to 3-4 sets of 10-15 reps.

Even More Better Butt Bundle							
	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Front Plank hip extension (forearm or hands)	xxx		xxx			xxx	
Side Plank with hip abduction (leg raise)	xxx		xxx			xxx	
Single leg squat	xxx		xxx			xxx	

COMMON STRENGTH EXERCISES FOR GLUTE MAX ACTIVATION

Hip thrusts

Done using a bench, feet on the floor, Barbell hip thrust in a hinge (keep your head in alignment with spine)

(Machines available in some locations, and weight plates can be substituted for a bar OR use single leg and body weight).

Squats

Holding dumbbells, with weighted vest for at home overload. If machine or rack: Preferable not spine-loaded (bar on back or front): Substitute a hip sled or leg press, keeping weight light enough to complete full range of motion to start.

Deadlifts

Note – more risk of injury, usually from too much range of motion, and beginning with poor core strength. Single leg with limited ROM reduces risk and allows benefit and focus to hamstring-glute connection where weakness is. Use 30-degree (no more than 45) range of motion and weight in opposite hand as weight bearing leg.

Lunges

Generally, do develop a little more soreness related to muscle damage

If you can comfortably a walking lunge is fine, otherwise, perform a stationary lunge

Take a moderate stride, heel stays down, front of knee aligned with front of shoe (knee aligned with heel at bottom spares knees but also emphasize hamstrings more)

Keep torso angled forward slightly to increase activation, but not so much that you're stressing the knee

Step Ups - Alternately, from a step to a rear lunge, especially if you have less weight or it's difficult to juggle weights (a vest is also a way to do this)

Glute Hyper

An alternative to DB deadlift if risk of injury is greater for you. (Prior high hamstring pulls can indicate this). Machine at gym or at home: Counter height or bench (bent leg if bench) –straight leg? Start feet together bottom, wide at top.

Seated banded hip abduction

Optionally: vary sitting up, rounding, extending/lean back slightly

Better Butt Traditional Exercises (include in TOTAL body workouts)							
	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Hip Thrusts	xxx			xxx			
Squats	xxx			xxx			
Deadlifts (single leg)	xxx			xxx			
Lunges Rear (alternate or single leg)	xxx			xxx			
Side lunges (alternate or single leg)							
Glute hyper machine/counter/ or bench/ball	xxx			xxx			
Seated Band Abduction	xxx			xxx			
Side Planks with top leg lift	xxx			xxx			
Single leg squat (ideal for warmups)	xxx			xxx			

Review Instructions:

After a few weeks of concentrated glute work if you still feel you really need concentrated glute focus: follow the weekly plans above until you can easily perform three to four sets of 10-15 repetitions of each exercise.

- Begin with the Starter Bundle
- Move on to the Better Butt Bundle
- Progress to Even More Better Butt Exercises

This can be done any day of the week. Aim for 3-4 days a week at least. You can do this in addition to your total body strength sessions from the 12-week program you're in. Same day or alternate days.

If you're not currently in a 12-week program for some reason (injury or adrenal fatigue) the Glute challenge may be your strength exercise. Add a few sets of major muscle upper body exercise to this (Choose from Rows, Pull ups, Pull overs, and Presses) to complete a full body program if possible.

If you're injured, know that maintaining lower body strength, or boosting it, even while you can't do more, will help with maintenance of muscle mass, strength and alignment. These core muscles (muscles knee to shoulders) are key to returning to full strength faster. You'll maintain better alignment and have less risk of compensation if you have a one-sided injury if you do what you can.

Flip:

If any of these exercises simply isn't possible (you can lie down but not weight bear on your feet, or can't put weight on shoulders for instance), then create a list of the exercises you CAN do and create a routine with those. You might want to consider Blood Flow Resistance bands if you're out of commission for an extended time and concerned about muscle loss.

For Traditional Exercises:

Each "x" = one set of a repetition range based on your strength training protocol

If 3 sets is too much to start, begin with 1 or 2, progressing to 3 when ready.

Once you've achieved the exercises try one of the variations beside bolded exercise instead. (You'll complete the same number of exercises/sets, just changing to vary or progress the difficulty).

Leave 72 hours between 2x a week total body strength workouts. Add push (e.g. chest press) and pull (e.g. pull ups, lat pulldown, row) exercises to complete a total body workout since total body is best for midlife+women interested in metabolism boost yet are also more vulnerable to adrenal stress.

Complete for 1-2 weeks depending on difficulty for you. As you go on to other/additional exercises, you can continue to include any in the challenge that seem especially challenging for your glutes that work for you in consideration of all joints and muscle status.

For a more time-friendly workout follow the program above to be inclusive of all the exercises and still keep workouts realistic in length. You can simply defer to the workouts in the 12-week program you're in, and add an exercise here or there to increase the glute focus.

One Last Review:

Are you still unclear, *"How does this fit in with my current strength training program?"*

If you're doing hip thrusts, squats, and deadlifts or lunges to muscular fatigue in a workout, this should be a total body strength day.

You don't want to do strength daily: you need the recovery to enjoy fitness. So those exercises should be reserved to 2 days a week. However, you can absolutely add a few other key glute medius-targeting exercises to your day. Any time of day. You can for instance do side planks for core after a workout, or later in the day. You can insert a single leg body weight squats between sets of heavy strength training sets if you like.

For many it will be easier to add these Challenge glute strength exercises on alternate days from strength training. You've got choices! Use your group to ask for coaching as needed!

That said...

At any time you may need to go back two spaces and actively recruit some lazy glutes for these big compound exercises to work better for you. That is, you may need to get your clam going or be more consistent with side plank for a while in order to fully benefit from your squats, lunges or deadlifts.

MASTERED THIS METABOLIC MUSCLE?

In addition, try step ups (and downs slowly), stairclimbing or using a step mill. Hiking and biking hills (sitting back in seat) are also great for glute engagement. If any of these give you knee or lower back issues, it can be a sign you need to return to some of these Glute Medius targeting exercises.

Above all, remember to rest and don't discount yoga poses that use glutes! During recovery you can still do those (then get those stretches like pigeon and the "#4" stretch. In fact, want to boost your results? If your hips are tight... start with 1-2 weeks of hip release before you get into the strength exercises OR alternate your hip stretches with your strength sessions.

"Exercise provides the opportunity for fitness. Fitness occurs in the rest between exercise sessions."

YOUR SECRET WEAPON

It's not just about strong glutes. With tight hips you may not completely enjoy that strength. If you're not already doing yoga or deep hip stretches, this short 4 exercise battery is great to use every day. Travel day? End with this. Big hike day? End with these 4 stretches. You'll target the front back and lateral hip.

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RESOURCES

Flipping 50 podcast: [Anywhere you get podcasts & show notes](#)

YouTube Channel

TEDx Talk: [Why Everything Women in Menopause Learned About Exercise May Be a Lie](#)