



PREVENTION & REHABILITATION

## Functional training of the gluteal muscles<sup>☆</sup>

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The gluteal muscles are on the radar for most fitness enthusiasts. Toning the buttocks and thighs is a sales pitch of countless exercise videos. In this self-care article the emphasis will not just be on toning for cosmetic purposes, but on activating the gluteals in their functional role. This can help achieve 2 distinct purposes. First, to prevent injury or overuse to the ankle, knee, hip, spine, and even shoulder girdle. And second, to enhance functional capacity during walking, running, pushing, pulling or throwing/striking tasks.

Functional training of the gluteals has more than a cosmetic purpose. It's main goal is twofold. First, to activate them in healthy movement patterns that do not stress neighboring body parts. Second, to integrate the gluteal activation into functional tasks so that you are less likely to become injured and your performance potential will be enhanced. Let us go over some simple gluteal progressions.

For each exercise the following guidelines for repetitions, sets, and frequency should be followed.

*Repetitions:* Perform between 8 and 12 times

*Sets:* 1

*Frequency:* 1–2x/day

### The bridge

- Place an elastic band around your knees.
- Lie on your back with your knees bent and toes lifted.
- Push outwards vs. the band while squeezing your gluteals together.
- Push your heels into the ground until you can feel your buttocks lifting up.
- Continue pushing your heels into the ground until your buttocks lifts up 4–6 inches.
- Gradually lower your buttocks to the floor.

*Note:* Imagine you are picking up a small coin by pinching your buttocks together and lifting it and then lowering it without letting ‘the coin’ drop (Figure 1).

If you feel your gluteals doing most of the work instead of the front of your thighs (quadriceps) or your back, then progress to single leg bridges. An additional progression is to bend your arms and perform with your elbows on the floor instead of your hands (Figure 2).

If you feel knee or lower back pain, or you feel your quadriceps more than your gluteals then “peel back” to the single leg bridge with knee to chest (Figure 3).

### The bridge on the ball

- Place an elastic band around your knees.
- Lie on your back on a gym ball.

<sup>☆</sup>This paper may be photocopied for educational use.

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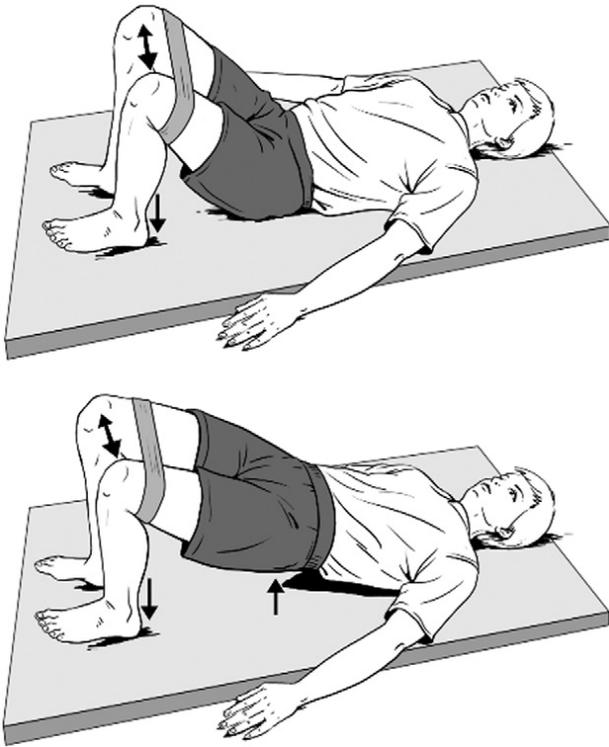


Figure 1 Bridge.

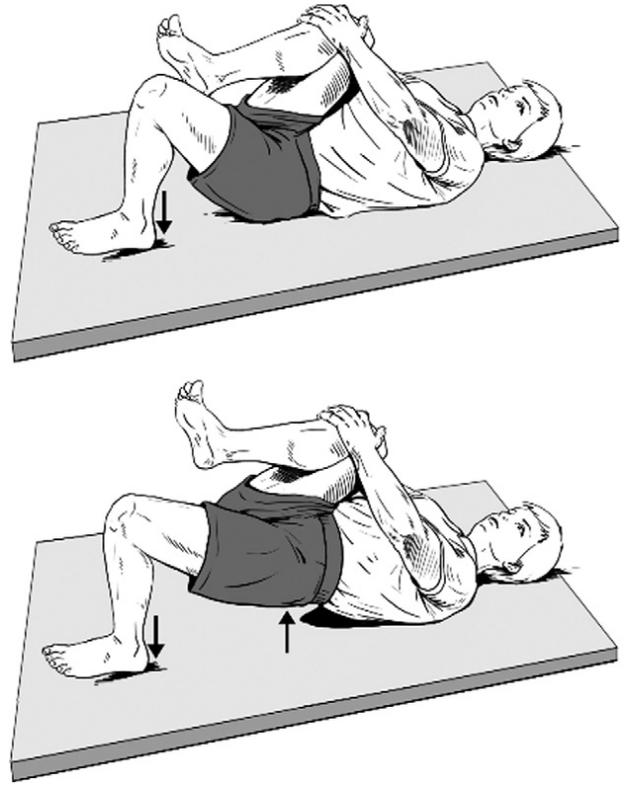


Figure 3 Single leg bridge with knee to chest.

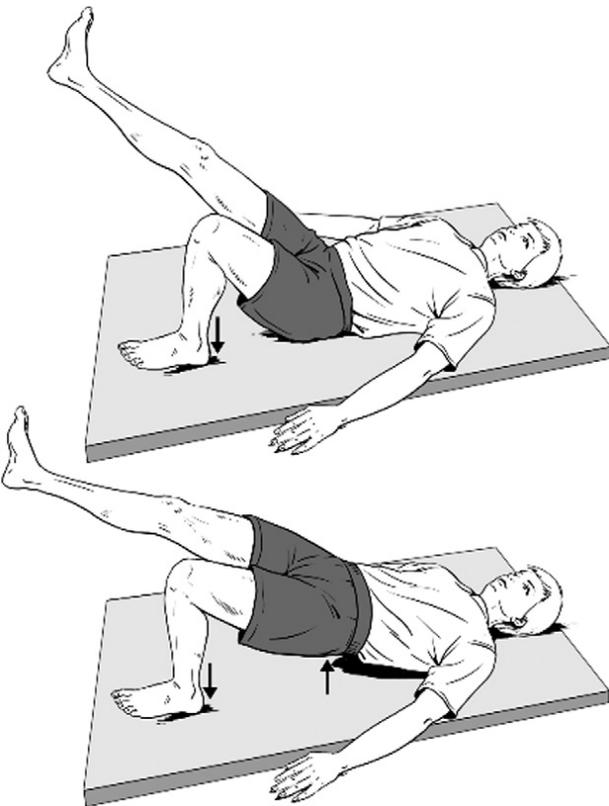


Figure 2 Single leg bridge.



Figure 4 Bridge on the ball.

- Your knees should be bent so that they are over your feet.
- Push outwards vs. the band while squeezing your gluteal muscles together.
- Push your heels into the ground until you can feel your buttocks lifting up.
- Continue pushing your heels into the ground until your buttocks lifts up until your body is in a straight line.
- Gradually lower your buttocks part way to the floor.



Otherwise you may progress the exercise by holding the bridge position and alternate heel raises in a quick, fluttering motion (Figure 5).

**Figure 5** Bridge on the ball with heel raises.

*Note:* Avoid arching your back.

If you feel this exercise in your back, thighs, or knees instead of your buttocks “peel back” to the bridge on the floor (Figure 4).

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