

3 Exercises To Activate Your Glutes

My passion for understanding the anatomy of movement science and biomechanics has distinguished my career and **Pilates method** over the years. This is especially true in my work today and produces lasting change for my clients. Our work together not only strengthens their Pilates practice, it improves the way they move through the world.

My focus is always on the whole body with my clients. However, to improve their overall movement, we continually identify specific areas that need stronger connection to the brain. One of the muscle groups that is hard for some of my clients and many others to activate is the glutes.

The Gluteal Muscles

In this blog I'm discussing how to use Pilates to properly activate the glute muscles. The **gluteal muscles** include the gluteus maximus, medius and minimus.

Often the tensor fasciae latae (TFL), located mostly on the lateral side of the hip, is included in the gluteal muscles as well. All of these glute muscles are found where the back side of the pelvis and the top back of the femur (thigh) meet. These muscles have many functions.

One of their primary movements that I will focus on is **hip extension** (think bridging up from floor or lifting the leg behind you). These are movements we work on regularly in my **Pilates** and **Dance-Based Toning programs**. The gluteal muscles are important in a variety of other significant activities such as walking, climbing stairs and standing up from a sitting position.

Avoid compensating with the wrong muscles

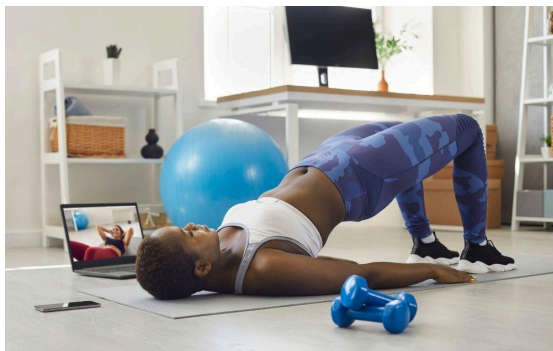
The glutes provide the buttock region with its rounded shape and form. If you don't have that shape and are struggling to get it, you may not be properly activating your glutes.

Many of my clients at Lee Pilates Method have struggled with glute activation, as have I. Strong gluteal muscles however, will not only provide the shape you

desire. They are very important for supporting overall hip and back health and reducing **compensatory movements** that can cause injury.

For instance, if your glutes are weak you may overuse and injure your **hip flexors**, the muscles that lift your thigh toward your trunk when walking or running. Or you may strain your lower back during squatting or the **Pilates Swimming** exercise. This can be caused because your glutes are not active enough in those movements and you are compensating with your lower back. There are many more examples and you've probably experienced a few yourself.

Three Exercises to help you strengthen your glutes



Below I suggest three effective exercises to “turn on” these muscles, get them stronger and maximize your Pilates practice and other movement modalities.

1. Pelvic Curl

The **Pelvic Curl** is the Pilates name for one of our basic bridging exercises.

- Lie supine (on your back) on your mat.
- Place your arms at your sides and your soles of feet evenly beside one another. Your knees and feet are hip width apart.
- Exhale and roll your pelvis and ribs off the mat. Be sure to articulate your spine as you lift and lower it. In your bridge position your ribs so that they are lower than your pelvis and your pubic bone is higher than your hip bones.
- While in the bridge press the soles of your feet into the mat. It's important to press through every portion of each foot to get maximum benefit.
- Hold the bridge for five to ten seconds.
 - Roll down. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

If you feel this in your lower back, stop and adjust your alignment.

2. Feet against the wall

Although not specifically Pilates, I use this exercise with many clients.

- Lie supine (on your back) with your knees in a ninety degree bent angle and your soles of the feet on a wall.
- Lower one leg and tuck it under the other so that only one foot is on the wall. Scoot your bottom as close as you can to the wall so that the working hip is in deep hip flexion (bent at hip joint).
- Push the whole foot into the wall and lift your hips and trunk slowly off the floor into a bridge. (Think more of hinging vs articulating the spine.)
- Focus on driving through the glute max (the most superficial of the glute muscles) and continue to push the entire foot into the wall. Hold for a few seconds and lower.
- Repeat 5 to 10 times.

If you feel this in your lower back, lift the trunk less high until your glute is strong enough to do the work and your low back does not compensate.

3. Prone isometric leg lift

You will need a partner for this exercise.

- Lie prone (face down) on a mat with your legs at hip width and in a parallel position. 2. Keep your pelvis as neutral as you can by placing your hip bones on the heel of your palms and your pubic bone on your finger tips. (Your hands will form a triangle.) Keep the pressure of these three pelvic bones even on your “triangle.”
- Have your partner place their hands on the back of your mid thigh above your knee. 4. Lift your leg slightly off the mat and push your leg into your partner’s hands while your partner pushes back creating isometric tension.
- Hold for 5 seconds and relax. Repeat a few times.
- Isometric contractions are a great way to map or get the brain to recognize a specific area of the body. This turns on the nerves that activate specific muscles, in this case the glutes. If you feel this in your lower back you may be compensating there instead of working the glutes. Reduce the effort a little and be sure to keep your pelvic bones even on your triangle.

Exercise is a science



At **Lee Pilates Method** we know that when it comes to Pilates and all movement, just like everything in life, it isn't what you do but the habits of how you do it that count. I hope these simple and effective exercises help you not only strengthen these important muscles but help you to achieve a much fuller and more robust exercise experience.

For more tips and educational videos, explore my **On Demand** platform. In addition to hundreds of exercise videos, I have an **educational library** with much more information on how to move safely and well to get the results you want. Take some time to watch and absorb these videos. In addition to the exercises above, they can help you achieve the transformation you want.