

Simple Exercise to Loosen Tight Hips, Back and Hamstrings

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Regular kicking exercises improve hip, hamstring and lower back flexibility while simultaneously strengthening your core, ankles and knees through weight-shifting movements
- › Different kick variations (front, side, roundhouse, back and flutter kicks) target specific muscle groups and offer unique benefits for overall body mobility and flexibility
- › Research shows that even gentle kicking exercises, like balloon-kicking while lying down, significantly improve muscle strength and mobility in people with limited movement
- › Consistency is key — start with gentle movements for a few minutes daily, gradually increasing intensity and range of motion as your body adapts
- › The practice of kicking extends beyond martial arts, offering comprehensive benefits for posture, spinal health and overall well-being

Are you struggling with tight hips, a stiff lower back or hamstring discomfort? You might find relief and improved mobility through a simple yet effective exercise: kicking. Mobility expert and personal trainer Mike Chang highlighted kicking as an underrated method to enhance flexibility and strength in your lower body.

Unlike what you might think, kicking isn't just for martial artists; it's a powerful tool for increasing your hip, hamstring and lower back mobility. Chang wrote:¹

"Kicking is a great way to loosen up your hips, hamstrings and lower back. It's often overlooked and seen more as a martial arts movement than an exercise for increasing lower-body mobility.

It also increases your balance, strengthens your core, ankles, knees, as well as increasing your foot strength from shifting your weight onto one foot. The most important thing to remember when starting to do kicks is to do a little bit each day to recondition your body's ability to perform this exercise."

Start Gradually to Build Your Strength

Incorporating kicking into your routine offers multiple benefits. Not only does it stretch and loosen tight muscles, but it also enhances your balance and strengthens your core, ankles and **knees**. By shifting your weight onto one foot, you naturally build foot strength, which is essential for overall stability and movement efficiency.²

Chang emphasizes the importance of consistency, suggesting that you start with just a few minutes each day. Begin with gentle movements, such as knee raises or low kicks, and gradually increase the intensity and range of motion as your body adapts.³

Patience and progressive practice are key. You don't need to perform high kicks right away; instead, focus on slowly extending your legs and feeling the stretch in your muscles. Over time, your body will recondition itself, making it easier to achieve higher kicks and greater flexibility.

Mastering Different Kicks for Enhanced Body Mobility

Incorporating various types of kicks into your exercise routine helps effectively target and strengthen your hamstrings, hips and knees. Each kick engages different muscle groups and offers unique benefits, contributing to overall body flexibility and stability.

- **Front kick – stretching and strengthening your front thighs and hips** – The front kick is a fundamental move that primarily engages your quadriceps, hip flexors,

lower abdominals and glutes.⁴ This kick effectively stretches and strengthens your hamstrings and hip flexors, improving their flexibility and reducing tightness.

This movement also enhances the **mobility of your hips**, allowing for greater range of motion and better posture. Regular practice also increases lower back flexibility as your core engages to stabilize your body during the kick. To perform a front kick:

1. Stand upright with your feet shoulder-width apart, hands guarding your face.
 2. Lift your knee towards your chest, keeping it bent at a 90-degree angle.
 3. Extend your leg forward swiftly, snapping your foot out toward the target while keeping your torso upright.
 4. Quickly retract your leg back to the starting position to maintain balance and prepare for the next kick.
- **Side kick – expanding lateral flexibility and hip mobility** – Side kicks target your quadriceps, glutes and obliques, especially when incorporating body rotation. Side kicks enhance lateral flexibility and hip mobility by stretching the muscles on the sides of your hips and thighs.

This kick promotes greater hip rotation and stability, which are essential for maintaining balance and preventing lower back strain. Additionally, the dynamic movement helps release tension in your lower back, contributing to overall spinal flexibility. Here's how to execute a side kick:

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, one foot slightly behind the other.
 2. Lift your knee outward to the side, keeping it bent.
 3. Extend your leg sideways, pushing your foot out in a straight line while rotating your hips for added power.
 4. Bring your leg back to position smoothly.
- **Roundhouse kick – enhancing rotational mobility and lower back flexibility** – The roundhouse kick, also known as the turning kick, **engages your quadriceps**, glutes

and lower back muscles. This kick significantly improves rotational mobility in your hips and lower back. The circular motion stretches your hamstrings and engages your lower back muscles, enhancing their flexibility and reducing stiffness.

This kick also promotes better spinal mobility, allowing for smoother and more controlled movements during daily activities and athletic performance. To perform a roundhouse kick:

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, hands guarding your face.
 2. Turn your supporting foot outward, pivoting on the ball of your foot to rotate your hips.
 3. Lift your knee toward your chest, preparing to swing your leg.
 4. Swing your leg in a circular motion, striking the target with the top of your foot or shin.
 5. Retract your leg quickly to position and return to the starting stance.
- **Back kick – strengthening your posterior chain and increasing hamstring flexibility** – Back kicks specifically target your glutes, hamstrings, core muscles, lower back and hip flexors. They focus on your posterior chain, which is important for overall lower body stability, enhancing the flexibility and strength of your hamstrings and glutes.

By engaging your lower back and hip flexors, this kick promotes greater mobility in your hips and reduces tightness in your lower back. Strengthening these muscles supports better posture and alleviates discomfort in your lumbar region, contributing to overall lower body flexibility. Here's how to perform a back kick:

1. Stand upright with your feet shoulder-width apart, hands guarding your face.
2. Lift your knee behind you, keeping it bent at a 90-degree angle.
3. Extend your leg straight back, driving your heel toward the target while keeping your torso stable.
4. Bring your leg back to position smoothly.

- **Flutter kicks – boosting core and hip flexor mobility** – While not a traditional martial arts kick, flutter kicks are an excellent exercise for targeting your lower abdominals, hip flexors and quadriceps.⁵ Flutter kicks enhance core stability and hip flexor mobility by engaging your lower abdominals and quadriceps.

This exercise promotes flexibility in your hip area, reducing tightness and improving range of motion. Additionally, flutter kicks support lower back health by strengthening the core muscles that stabilize your spine, leading to increased overall mobility and reduced risk of back pain. To perform flutter kicks:

1. Lie on your back with your legs extended and arms by your sides.
2. Lift your heels about 6 inches off the ground and alternate kicking your legs up and down in a quick, fluttering motion.
3. Maintain steady breathing, keeping your lower back pressed into the floor.

General Muscle Engagement – Supporting Lower Body Mobility and Flexibility

Regardless of the kick type, several muscle groups are consistently engaged to provide stability and balance. Proper form and technique during kicking exercises ensure that these muscle groups are effectively targeted, enhancing your overall lower body mobility and flexibility. Consistent practice helps in loosening tight muscles, increasing the range of motion and preventing injuries by promoting balanced muscle development and joint stability.

- **Core muscles** – Your core stabilizes your body during kicks, ensuring balance and proper form.
- **Lower leg muscles** – The gastrocnemius, soleus and tibialis anterior work to stabilize your ankles and feet, supporting smooth and controlled movements.
- **Hip muscles** – Engaging your hip muscles is essential for generating power and controlling the movement of your legs during kicks.

By mastering these different types of kicks and understanding the specific benefits they offer for loosening and increasing mobility in your hamstrings, hips and back, you create a comprehensive exercise routine that enhances your overall flexibility and lower body health. Incorporate these kicks into your daily workouts to experience improved mobility, reduced muscle tightness and a more agile, resilient body.

Kicking Helps Maintain Muscle Strength and Mobility

As you age, preserving muscle strength and mobility becomes essential for maintaining independence and a high quality of life. Kicking exercises offer a straightforward and effective way to achieve these goals, especially for older adults who may have limited mobility or are recovering from injuries.

A study published in Healthcare demonstrated that simple kicking exercises, such as kicking a balloon while lying on a bed, significantly improved muscle strength in the lower limbs of elderly women with moderate Alzheimer's disease and [sarcopenia](#).⁶ Although the participants were specific, the principles apply broadly – engaging in regular kicking movements enhances the strength of your lower limb muscles, including your hamstrings, quadriceps and glutes.

Participants kicked a balloon tied to the ceiling while lying on their beds, performing this exercise for 30 minutes, five times a week over 12 weeks. This approach led to significant improvements in muscle strength, which are essential for maintaining joint flexibility and overall mobility.

The study found that participants who consistently performed the kicking exercise experienced notable increases in hip flexor and knee extensor strength. These gains are important for enhancing the range of motion in your hips and knees, reducing stiffness and promoting smoother, more controlled movements.

Improved muscle strength in these areas also supports better balance and coordination, which are key factors in preventing falls and injuries. Additionally, the engagement of

core and lower back muscles during kicking exercises contributes to enhanced spinal stability and posture.

This approach is particularly beneficial for individuals with limited mobility, providing a safe and effective way to maintain physical health without the need for extensive equipment or strenuous activity.

Whether you're performing gentle kicks while seated or engaging in more dynamic movements, these exercises help build a strong and flexible lower body, essential for maintaining your autonomy and enjoying an active, fulfilling life.

Embrace Kicking for Lasting Mobility and Wellness

Incorporating kicking exercises into your daily routine offers a simple approach to alleviating tight hips, a stiff lower back and uncomfortable hamstrings. The versatility of kicking extends beyond traditional martial arts, providing comprehensive benefits that enhance both flexibility and strength. Beyond the immediate improvements in muscle elasticity and joint mobility, kicking also fosters better posture and spinal health, essential for overall well-being.

Recent advancements in [wearable technology](#) may further optimize your kicking regimen, providing feedback to help maximize the effectiveness of each exercise. Additionally, integrating kicking exercises with mindfulness practices, such as [proper breathing](#) and focused intention, amplifies the benefits by promoting relaxation and reducing muscle tension.

Furthermore, community-based programs and virtual classes are making kicking exercises – from martial arts to kickboxing – more accessible, offering support and guidance for individuals at all fitness levels. Whether you're a beginner or an experienced practitioner, these resources help you stay motivated and consistent in your practice. That said, even performing daily kicks at home is useful for advancing your fitness goals.

Ultimately, embracing kicking as a regular exercise not only loosens tight muscles but also cultivates a resilient and agile body, paving the way for a healthier, more active lifestyle. Start today and experience the lasting benefits of this dynamic and empowering exercise.

Sources and References

- [1, 2, 3 Fit & Well September 25, 2024](#)
- [4 Darebee, Guide to Kicks](#)
- [5 Nike, What Are Flutter Kicks?](#)
- [6 Healthcare \(Basel\). 2021 Jun 4;9\(6\):680](#)