

Tight Hips? Try These Moves to Help

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Sitting too much makes hips tight, causing knee pain, back problems, and poor balance, but simple exercises help fix these issues
- › Six key moves, like hip circles, knee rotations, and bridge lifts, help your hips work properly again and wake up sleeping muscles
- › Using a foam roller on tight muscles before exercises helps blood flow and loosens stiff areas that develop from sitting all day
- › Side-to-side movements like side lunges build strength in muscles most people rarely use, improving balance beyond just forward and backward motion
- › Just 15 minutes of hip exercises daily helps improve how you move, taking pressure off your knees and lower back

Every step you take depends on your hips doing their job. They aren't just joints; they're command centers for movement. When they stop functioning well, everything else pays the price. You might notice your knees aching, your back tightening or your balance getting worse. But what's actually going wrong starts higher up: your hips have lost control.

The problem usually begins quietly. Sitting too much changes how your muscles fire. Hips tighten. Glutes weaken. Your body adapts but not in your favor. Over time, that compensation becomes the new normal, and eventually, movement becomes strained,

inefficient or painful. You might blame the wrong area entirely. What most people overlook is how fast the damage builds — and how fixable it really is.

The key isn't stretching more or working out harder. It's retraining your hips to move the way they're meant to, restoring balance before pain spreads further. Understanding this root cause changes the way you look at mobility and reveals the key exercises needed to improve it.

This Hip Routine Trains Your Body to Move Better, Starting with 6 Moves

A New York Times article explored how simple hip exercises reverse damage from sitting. It focuses on how **long periods of sitting** weaken your glutes and tighten your hip flexors, two key muscle groups that support your entire lower body.¹

Over time, this leads to poor alignment, reduced mobility, and pain in other joints that are forced to compensate. While it's important to minimize the amount of time you spend sitting each day, a short, consistent set of exercises helps reverse the damage and restore balance in your body. These six moves work together to restore proper hip function, ease tension, and retrain your muscles to fire in the correct sequence.

- **Hip rotations reset your range of motion** — Stand straight, holding on to the back of a chair or countertop. Lift your left knee to a 90-degree angle and place a tennis ball behind the knee. The ball acts as a cue to make sure you're squeezing your heel toward your buttocks. Slowly rotate your knee outward, keeping the rest of your body still, until you reach your end range.

Next, drive your heel upward toward the ceiling as far as you can, then rotate the leg backward. Lower the knee and drive your heel upward. Hold for a few seconds, then lift your knee toward your chest. Next, reverse the motion series as demonstrated in the video below.

- **90/90 hip rotations improve internal and external rotation** – Sit on the floor with your knees bent and legs forming two 90-degree angles. Lean back slightly with your hands behind you. Move both knees from side to side like windshield wipers, then advance to deeper positions by bringing your hands off the floor. This move unlocks rotation that's lost in most people who sit too long and don't train lateral movement.
- **The side-lying hip shift reactivates your glutes and inner thighs** – Lie on your side with a foam roller or ball between your knees. Keeping your upper body still, slide your top knee forward and back as far as it can go. This is a low-impact move that stretches tight inner thighs and trains your glutes to activate in tandem. You'll feel it instantly in the muscles that protect your pelvis and stabilize your stride.
- **Lateral lunges bring back side-to-side stability** – From a standing position, take a big step out to one side and bend that knee into a lunge. Keep your opposite leg straight and push your hips back. This strengthens your hip stabilizers that keep your knees from collapsing inward. Most people don't train lateral motion, and it shows up as instability during squats, lunges or quick direction changes.
- **Romanian deadlifts reinforce proper hip hinging** – Stand tall with a soft bend in your knees. Slide your hands down your thighs as you hinge your hips backward. Go slowly until you feel a **stretch in your hamstrings**, then squeeze your glutes to return to standing. This move teaches you how to move from your hips, not your back, while building strength and control in your glutes and posterior chain, which includes all the muscles that connect to your pelvis.
- **Glute bridges restore hip extension and wake up dormant muscles** – Lie on your back with feet flat and knees bent. Drive through your heels and lift your hips as high as possible while keeping your shoulder blades on the floor. Pause at the top and focus on squeezing your glutes before lowering. To make it harder, do single-leg versions or add resistance with a dumbbell or resistance band.

5 Hip-Focused Movements to Rebuild Strength, Mobility, and Pelvic Control

CNN laid out five foundational hip exercises designed to restore balance and mobility where it matters most.² Written by certified strength and conditioning coach Dana Santas, the article focuses on how tight hip flexors and weak stabilizing muscles create a cascade of movement issues.

Her targeted routine doesn't require fancy equipment or extreme flexibility. Instead, it's a structured way to reintroduce strength, coordination, and freedom of motion to one of the most important movement hubs in your body – your hips.

- **Begin with soft-tissue release to unlock tense hip muscles** – Before doing any mobility or strength work, Santas recommends using a foam roller or massage for 30 to 60 seconds per muscle group. Focus on your glutes, outer thighs, quads, hamstrings, and inner thighs.

This primes your nervous system, increases circulation and breaks up the rigidity that builds from long bouts of sitting or repetitive movement patterns. A 10-minute sample routine focused on hip pain relief is presented below.

- **Use a three-way hip flexor release to restore full extension** – Modern lifestyles shorten your hip flexors and pull your pelvis into **poor alignment**. Santas' go-to fix is the three-way release, which moves your hip through forward, lateral and diagonal patterns. This helps reintroduce natural range and allows your body to reconnect with full hip extension – a movement pattern required for walking, running, and lifting with proper form.
- **Rebuild inner thigh and glute strength with a block-supported glute bridge** – This variation of a glute bridge brings in your adductors, a group of muscles located on the inner thigh, which are often weak from underuse.

Lie down with knees bent and a yoga block or rolled towel between your knees. Lift your hips a few inches while squeezing the block, keeping your core engaged and movement slow. This helps reactivate the stabilizers that control how your hips move through space – key for building lasting strength and control.

- **Lateral lunges reintroduce movement in neglected planes** – Most workouts and daily activities move your body forward and backward. But your hips are built to move in all directions. Lateral lunges train your body to step out of that plane and strengthen the muscles needed for side-to-side movement, balance and stability. Santos encourages slow, deliberate reps to build strength and coordination, not just flexibility.
- **Swap aggressive hip stretches for safer, more supportive positions** – Santos suggests using stretches that allow you to control the angle and avoid joint strain. The first option is the seated figure-four stretch, where you cross one ankle over the opposite knee while sitting in a chair.

The second is a modified pigeon pose, using a couch or sturdy box. This pose is a supported stretch that targets your hips without putting excess strain on your knees or lower back.

To do it, place one shin across the seat of the couch so your knee and ankle rest on the cushion. Your other leg stays behind you in a kneeling lunge position with your hips facing forward. Keep your torso upright or gently lean forward over the front leg to deepen the stretch. This variation allows you to stretch your glutes and outer hips while keeping your joints stable and supported. It's ideal if the conventional floor-based pigeon feels too intense or unstable.

3 Hip Drills to Rebuild Power, Posture, and Balance

In an article from Men's Health, fitness trainer Lee Boyce outlined a short list of hip-specific drills designed to fix an underlying source of poor posture, weak glutes and tight lower backs.³ These aren't flashy moves, but they're targeted to address exactly

what many people lack: controlled hip movement. Each drill works a different aspect of mobility, strength, or coordination – and all of them are meant to be quick, effective and repeatable.

- **Hip circles unlock range of motion and coordination** – Start on all fours with your knees under your hips. Slowly lift one leg outward and rotate it in a wide arc, then reverse the motion. Your torso should stay completely still – no twisting, no leaning. This move reintroduces your brain to the full 360-degree rotation your hip joint is designed for. It's especially useful if you feel stiff getting up from a chair or tight when stepping sideways.
- **Seated hip lifts build raw flexor strength and improve stride control** – Sit upright with your legs straight in front of you. Place a kettlebell, foam roller or any small object near one ankle. Keeping your leg extended, lift it up and over the object without leaning back or twisting. This isolates your hip flexors and teaches them to activate cleanly. If you struggle to clear the object, that's a sign your hip strength is lagging, and your stride length and balance are suffering because of it.
- **The crescent lunge resets posture and lengthens tight hip flexors** – Drop into a half-kneeling position with one foot forward and the other knee on the ground. Squeeze your glute on your back leg and push your hips forward while reaching both hands overhead. This lengthens your hip flexors while engaging stabilizer muscles and straightening out pelvic tilt.
- **Each drill targets a specific dysfunction that shows up in daily life** – Hip circles are for rotational control. Seated hip lifts target weakness that shortens your stride and throws off gait mechanics. The crescent lunge addresses an arched lower back, which wrecks posture. Together, these drills rebuild how your body sequences movement from the hips down.
- **The goal is coordination and control** – Your body learns from repetition. If you sit all day, it learns to move stiffly. These drills teach your hips to lead again, with proper timing and muscle activation. When done consistently, even just one a day,

they rebuild fluid, powerful movement and relieve pressure on everything from your knees to your lower back.

Tight Hips Are Fixable if You Train Them the Right Way

If you've been dealing with stiff hips, low back tightness or unexplained knee pain, this is where you start turning things around. Your hips aren't the problem; they're the signal. What's happening is that your daily habits, especially sitting for long stretches, are locking your hip flexors into a shortened position and turning off your glutes.

With just a few intentional moves a day, you'll start to reverse the dysfunction that sitting and inactivity create. The key is focusing on small movements that retrain your nervous system and activate the right muscles in the right order. Start with these:

- 1. Ease into motion with tissue release that primes your hips to move** — Before diving into exercises, use a foam roller or massage tool to loosen up high-friction areas like your glutes, outer thighs, quads, and adductors. Spend 30 to 60 seconds on each region. This simple step improves blood flow and reduces muscle guarding, so your body's more willing to stretch and strengthen afterward. Think of it as clearing the traffic jam before hitting the road.
- 2. Rebuild coordination with one precise mobility drill** — Mobility isn't just range of motion; it's controlled range of motion. That's where hip rotations come in. From all fours, rotate your leg in a wide, controlled arc, isolating movement at the hip without letting your spine shift. Just five reps per side per day helps reconnect your brain to your hips and restores smooth, pain-free movement.
- 3. Train your stabilizers by combining glute and inner thigh work** — When your hips aren't stable, everything downstream suffers. One of the most effective ways to retrain stability is a glute bridge with a yoga block or rolled towel between your knees. As you lift your hips, squeeze the block hard. This dual activation lights up your glutes and adductors, reinforcing alignment and preventing your legs from collapsing inward during everyday movement.

- 4. Bring in lateral strength with a move most routines skip** – Your hips are designed to move in every direction – not just forward and back. Lateral lunges train neglected muscles that stabilize your pelvis during side-to-side movement. Step wide, push your hips behind you and control the return to standing. This is core training for your hips, teaching them how to handle shifting loads like stairs, uneven ground or quick direction changes.

- 5. Stretch smart with positions that give you control, not pain** – Aggressive stretching backfires when your hips are tight and uncooperative. Instead, use supportive positions like the seated figure-four stretch or a modified pigeon pose on a couch. These allow you to gradually deepen the stretch without overloading your knees or spine. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds while breathing slowly. This tells your nervous system it's safe to let go, which is how true flexibility returns.

FAQs About Tight Hip Exercises

Q: What causes tight hips in the first place?

A: Tight hips are usually caused by long periods of sitting, which keep your hip flexors in a shortened position and turn off your glutes. Over time, this reduces blood flow, weakens key stabilizing muscles and leads to stiffness and poor movement control.

Q: How do tight hips affect the rest of my body?

A: When your hips lose mobility or strength, your knees, back, and even ankles start compensating. This shift leads to chronic knee pain, poor posture and reduced power in movements like squats, running, or jumping. The damage often shows up in other joints first.

Q: Can I fix tight hips without going to physical therapy?

A: Yes. Reverse tight hips by doing a simple routine that includes soft-tissue work, mobility drills and strengthening exercises like glute bridges, hip rotations and lateral lunges. You only need 15 minutes a day to start seeing results.

Q: What are signs that your hips are limiting your mobility?

A: If you feel stiff getting out of a chair, struggle to lift your leg while keeping your torso upright or lose balance during side steps or quick turns, your hips likely lack mobility or control. These signs show up during everyday movements and often go unnoticed until they affect your performance or cause discomfort.

Q: What's the best first step to start improving hip mobility?

A: Begin with a foam roller to release tension in your glutes, quads and hamstrings. Then add controlled hip mobility drills and glute activation work. Even one or two targeted movements each day builds momentum and restores better function.

Sources and References

- ¹ [The New York Times April 30, 2025](#)
- ² [CNN April 25, 2025](#)
- ³ [Men's Health April 24, 2025](#)