

“The body is shaped, disciplined, honored, and in time, trusted.”

Martha Graham,  
“I Am a Dancer”

## Take the Lunge

To tighten up your behind, get a leg up:  
Know how to execute a perfect lunge.

TIME IS A GREAT HEALER. Unfortunately, it deals derrieres a low blow. Adding more miles to your walking or running routine won't help lift a drooping backside, but an exercise that targets the glutes, like the lunge, will. Lunges will also help sculpt your legs, tone your torso, and improve your balance. “The lunge works nearly

every muscle in the middle and lower body,” says Mark Verstegen, a trainer in Tempe, Arizona, and the author of *Core Performance Essentials* (out in December; Rodale, \$28).

And the lunge is simple—if you can walk, you can lunge. Turn the page to learn how to do the basic move and advanced variations, then lunge in.

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## For Beginners

If your glutes have been neglected, start with this basic backward lunge—stepping backward makes it easier to maintain proper form. Do two sets of six repetitions twice a week, gradually increasing to eight and then 10 reps three times a week. If you have been regularly doing lunges (the Warrior Pose in yoga, say), try the variations on the following page.



**STEP 1:** Stand with your feet hip-width apart, shoulders back, abdominals pulled in, and arms relaxed by your sides. Focus your eyes on a fixed object straight ahead.



**STEP 2:** Contracting your left buttock muscle, step back on your left foot about 2½ feet. As your foot touches the floor, bend both knees until your right thigh is parallel to the floor and your left knee is as low as possible without causing discomfort. Your left heel should be off the floor. Hold for one to two seconds.



**STEP 3:** If you're feeling steady, reach up with your left arm and bend to the right until you feel a mild stretch in your torso and front hip muscle. Your head and neck should bend slightly as a natural extension of your spine. Return your torso to the upright position and lower your arm.



**STEP 4:** Return to the standing position by bringing your left foot forward. Repeat with the other leg, then alternate sides until you have completed six repetitions with each leg. Rest for 60 to 90 seconds, then do a second set.

## A Place to Lunge

Lunges can be done just about anywhere—in your home or office, even at the playground. Just make sure you do them with full concentration so that you maintain perfect form. “I wouldn’t recommend lunging while you’re talking on the phone,” says Lori Incledon, a trainer in Chandler, Arizona, and the author of *Strength Training for Women* (Human Kinetics, \$19). Here’s what she does recommend.

- Do the walking lunge (see following page) down a hallway in your home.
- Lunge when you’re picking up toys or books from the floor.
- Do a few lunges at the playground while the kids are on the swings.
- Close your office door and do a few split squats (see following page) between meetings and phone calls.
- If you don’t mind a few stares, lunge during an airport layover.

**tip** As you step into a lunge, contract your buttock muscles. This will prevent your thigh muscles from taking control of the movement. “Let the glutes propel you up,” says trainer Lori Incledon.

## For Intermediates

Once you have mastered a simple lunge, move on to the walking lunge, which will help improve your balance and coordination and boost your cardiovascular fitness.



**STEP 1:** Clear a pathway about 10 yards long. Stand with your feet hip-width apart, shoulders back, abdominals pulled in, and arms relaxed by your sides.



**STEP 2:** Step forward with your left foot into a lunge, contracting your right glute. Your right heel will lift off the floor. Make sure your left knee doesn't move past your toes. Keep the big toe of your front foot on the floor, your right glute contracted, and your stomach slightly pulled in.



**STEP 3:** Keeping your chest up, step forward with your right foot into the next lunge. Hold each lunge position for one to two seconds. Take 12 steps, so that you're lunging six times on each side, then rest 60 to 90 seconds and repeat.

## Oh, My Aching Knees!

If you've injured your knees, you shouldn't do lunges at all. But what if you have healthy knees and still find lunges difficult? The problem may be insufficient strength or mobility in the leg and hip muscles. "Knee pain is often caused by muscle tightness, lack of stability, or using the wrong muscles," says trainer Mark Verstegen. The glute bridge (below, right) addresses all three issues. Squeezing a towel or a ball between your knees as you do the bridge helps release the tightness on the outsides of your legs, which may be pulling your knees into poor alignment and causing discomfort during exercise. Also, **develop your hamstrings.** Muscle imbalances contribute to knee injuries, and many women have relatively powerful quadriceps but wimpy hamstrings.

## For Experts

This variation provides a more intense workout for glutes and thighs, and gives front hip muscles a greater stretch.



## One-Legged Split Squat

Place your right foot on a low bench (as shown). Lower your hips by squatting down into a comfortable stretch. Don't let your left knee slide in front of your toes; if it does, move your left foot forward. Return to the starting position by pushing up with your leg. Repeat six times, then switch sides.

## For the Weak-Kneed

If your knees are injured or just weak, try this simple bridge, which does not put direct pressure on the joints.



## Glute Bridge

Lie on your back with arms flat, knees bent, and heels on the floor, toes up. Squeeze a rolled towel or a ball between your knees. Lift your hips off the floor until knees, hips, and shoulders are aligned. Hold for two to three seconds; lower. Do three times a week, gradually increasing from 6 to 10 reps.