



KICK BUTT

A firm, shapely bottom not only looks nice in your Levi's but also protects your joints and makes everything you do easier. These four moves will tone your tush in no time.

By Selene Yeager

YOUR MUSCLES ARE SMART. Ask them to do a job, and they'll adapt to do it powerfully and efficiently. That's why the Curves circuit puts everyone through their paces, working women hard to keep them strong and capable. Unfortunately, the largest and maybe most important muscle in your charge—the gluteus maximus—spends the majority of its non-Curves time (nearly 8 hours a day, according to a survey)—planted in park, even if you're among Curves' most faithful devotees.

All this time on inactive duty makes glutes go soft, so the muscles often stop firing correctly. That not only leaves your buns sagging in your swimsuit but also makes your other lower-body muscles work harder than they should, which slows you down and sets you up for aches, pains, and even injury.

Your glutes act as platform, steering wheel, and engine for your lower body. Your three glute mus-

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cles—the maximus, minimus, and medius—hold your pelvis upright and stable when you walk, run, or play, which keeps your legs moving in the direction you want to go, rather than collapsing inward or bowing outward. The glutes also extend your hips to propel you as you walk down the road.

“When your glutes aren't firing, the pelvis and femurs are like wet noodles, flopping around,” says Boulder, Colorado-based exercise physiologist Allison Westfahl, the author of *The Gluten Free Fat Loss Plan*. “It's like a baseball team. Imagine that the pitcher isn't throwing correctly, so the first baseman has to step in and start pitching. He'll never perform that job as well as the pitcher; it's not his specialty. His arm gets tired and the catcher gets frustrated; eventually, the whole team falls apart.” In your case, that team comprises your lower back, hips, knees, ankles, and feet—they all have to pick up the slack when your glutes sit down on the job.

Get Your Rear in Gear

The good news is that Curves already has your back—your backside, that is—with four machines that put those sitting muscles to work. “The Glute Machine, Hip Abductor/Adductor, Leg Press, and Squat Machine are great for strengthening your glute muscles,” says Katie Mitchell, Curves director of exercise and research. But to build an even stronger behind, you can supplement your circuit with a walk that incorporates a handful of balance-based moves that make your buns work overtime to stabilize your body as you step, lunge, and twist. These total-butt toners will not only make you look better from behind—a perk we all appreciate come shorts season—but also put more power (and stability) into every step when you walk, hike, run, or play sports like tennis and golf. The end result: You’re more sure on your feet, so you can move faster longer and burn more calories, shed unwanted fat, and feel younger and stronger.

“The more you can move your behind, the better off you are, especially if you, like nearly everyone these days, spend a lot of time sitting down,” says Westfahl. “I jokingly tell my clients to move their ‘lazy butts,’ not because these people are lazy, but because their glute muscles are lazy from being supported and stabilized by chairs all the time.”

Tone on the Go

One of the best exercises for firing up your fanny muscles is also the easiest—walking—and Curves Complete has you doing plenty of it! When you walk, you plant your foot on your heel, roll along the sole, and push off your toes, engaging your glutes with every step. (For maximum firming, forcefully push off your back foot as though you’re trying to show someone behind you the sole of your shoe.) To engage your glutes even more, add the following four exercises to your next walk. The moves will challenge all three glute muscles from every angle, which guarantees that these stabilizers will get firm and strong in no time.

Perform 2 or 3 sets of 10 to 15 reps of each exercise. Aim to do these exercises 3 days a week, either as part of a walk or on their own, perhaps on days when you can’t get to Curves.



CURTSY: Stand tall, hands on hips. Take a giant step back and to the left with right leg. Bend knees and lower hips until left thigh is parallel to ground or floor. Return to start. Complete a full set, then switch sides. Note: See video for modifications.



FLYING V: Stand with left leg next to a curb or step, hands on hips. Step up onto the curb or step with left foot and extend right leg out to the side. Keeping left foot planted, lower right leg back to start. That’s 1 rep. Continue to lift and lower right leg for a full set, then switch legs.



WALKING LUNGE: Take a giant step and lunge forward, leading with right leg. Drop left knee straight down, keeping right knee over ankle (you should be able to see your toes). Push off with right leg and lunge forward with left leg, repeating the move. Control the motion, so your front knee doesn’t cave inward.



TREE TWIST: Place hands against a wall, tree, bench back, or other supportive structure. Walk feet back and lean forward slightly. Rise onto tips of toes and flatten back.* Bend left knee and raise it to hip height. Place bottom of left foot against right inner thigh. Keeping torso and hips stable, sweep left knee to the left and open hip. Bring knee back in front, then extend left leg behind you to place toes back on floor or ground. Repeat with right leg.

*The first time you do this exercise, you may want to keep your feet flat on the ground. As you improve in strength and balance, you can move onto the balls of your feet and eventually onto your toes.