

Leg exercises

Squat with Ball

Do it:

Place an exercise ball between the wall and the curve of your lower back. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.

Bend your knees and lower 5 to 10 inches, keeping your shoulders level and your hips square. Hold this position for 3 seconds and then stand back up.

Start with 5 reps and work up to 12. Rest for 30 seconds and do another set.

The Flamingo Balance

Do it:

Holding a dumbbell in your right hand, stand with your left hand on your hip.

Lean forward slightly, lifting your left foot behind you to about hip height. At the same, bring your right arm forward.

Turn your palm to face the ceiling and do a biceps curl.

Touch your toes back down briefly, then repeat for 12 reps. Be sure to keep your left leg straight while bending your right knee.

Switch sides: Stand with your left foot forward. Hold the dumbbell in your left hand, and hinge forward, raising your right leg up behind you to hip height.

Simultaneously, raise your left arm forward, turn your palm to the ceiling, and do a biceps curl.

Touch your toes back down briefly, and repeat for 12 reps.

Plyometric Squat

Do it:

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.

Squat down, bending your knees to 90 degrees.

Now jump up and land softly again in the squat position. Use the strength in your legs and butt to jump up explosively.

Remember to land as softly as you can with your knees bent; keep your

weight back, over your heels.

Do 3 sets of 8 reps.

The Single-Leg Circle

Do it:

Lie back on the mat with your arms by your sides and your palms facing down.

Begin by pointing with your left foot, as if reaching out with your toes toward the ceiling, and rotate your leg slightly outward.

Inhale, and trace a circle on the ceiling with your left leg, moving your whole leg, but keeping your hips still. Don't lift your left hip off the floor.

Trace the circle on the ceiling 5 times in a clockwise direction. Repeat in a counter-clockwise direction.

Switch legs and repeat 5 times.

Lunges with Dumbbells

Do it:

Stand with your feet hip-width apart, holding a 5- or 8-pound dumbbell in each hand.

Lunge forward with your left leg, then straighten your leg. When you lunge, your right knee should come to about an inch above the ground without touching it.

Keep your torso perpendicular to the floor, with your weight evenly distributed between your legs. Align your front knee over your front ankle, keeping the weight in your heels instead of on your toes.

Continue these lunges for 30 seconds before switching sides and doing another 30 seconds on the other leg.

Phase 2 of lunges with dumbbells:

Hold the dumbbells at shoulder height, palms facing front.

Lunge forward with one leg, then bring your feet back together and lunge forward with the other leg. You should continue lunging on alternate legs for 60 seconds.

Add a biceps curl in the final progression of this move: After each lunge

forward, push through the heel of your forward foot while lifting your back knee in front of you to hip level.

Do a biceps curl, then step back into a lunge. Repeat the lunge, plus curl, on one leg for 30 seconds, and then switch legs for another 30 seconds.

Toe Squat with Overhead Reach

Do it:

Come into a chair pose, abs engaged, inner knees and ankles touching, hips lowered to a half-squat, dumbbell over your head.

Now come up onto the balls of your feet and keep your lower legs controlled as you lower and lift your butt, about 4 inches.

Take your time and keep yourself steady as you lift and lower, between 8 and 12 times.

Sun Salutation

Do it:

On a mat, stand tall with your feet together and your arms by your sides. Be sure to distribute your weight evenly through the soles of your feet.

To begin, take a deep breath and lift your chin slightly as you raise your arms over your head.

Now, with your arms straight and your palms facing each other, reach toward the ceiling with your fingertips. (This is mountain pose.)

From the mountain pose, sweep your arms down to the sides, exhaling as you swan dive forward into the forward bend. Bend at your hips until your palms or fingertips touch the floor on either side of your feet.

Keep your fingers aligned with your toes and bend your knees if your back or hamstrings are tight.

From the forward bend, move into a flat back, inhaling as you raise your torso to waist height, keeping your back flat. Bring your gaze forward, reaching with your tailbone away from the top of your head. Keep your head aligned with your spine and your navel pulled in.

Bend your knees and place your palms flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.

Jump or walk both feet backward and lift your hips, coming into a downward facing dog. Spread your fingers and make sure your feet are parallel and hip-width apart. Reach with your tailbone toward the ceiling.

Hold this position for a moment, breathing as you move deeper into the pose.

To reverse this series, jump or walk your feet forward into the flat-back pose.

Drop your head, straighten your legs, and bring your fingers outside either foot, moving into the forward bend.

Lastly, sweep your arms overhead as you return to mountain pose.

Plie

Do it:

Stand with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart and your toes pointing out.

Bring your arms out straight in front of you and lower into a squat.

Come back up and repeat. Go as low into the squat as you can without letting your knees move past your toes.

Be sure to tuck your tailbone under and contract your glutes. Keep your torso tall, and don't let your knees creep past your toes.

Do for 1 minute. (After about 40 seconds, pulse at the bottom of the squat for 20 seconds.)

Pick-Up Squat

Do it:

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, holding a 5- or 8-pound dumbbell in each hand by your sides.

Bend your knees 90 degrees, keeping your chest lifted as you place the dumbbells down, outside your feet.

Stand up and immediately squat down again, picking up the weights at your feet.

Repeat for 1 minute, alternating lowering the weights and picking them up.

Outer and Inner Thigh Kick Stretch

Do it:

Stand holding the back of a chair. Press your shoulder blades back and down.

Come up onto the ball of your left foot, and lift your right leg.

Keeping your abs pulled in, bring your right leg across your body, in front of your left.

Now, swing it back out to the right, keeping your toes flexed and your toes turned out. Use momentum to swing through your leg as you fire through your left glutes.

Do 10 reps. Be sure to keep both hips facing forward.

Come onto the right leg and repeat for 10 more reps, again making sure your hips are facing forward.

Flex your foot as you use momentum to swing your left leg and fire through your right glutes.

Take a breather, then do a second set.