

This Month's Focus: Hips

1. Strength. Start on the hands and knees with a small exercise ball (4-6 inches in diameter) behind the knee of the right leg (so the right foot will be slightly off the floor). Point the feet. A towel or yoga mat may be folded and placed under the knees for comfort. Do 8 knee lifts to the back, 8 knee lifts to the front (in toward the tummy), then 8 knee lifts to the side with the right leg—all while continuing to hold the ball behind the knee. Place the ball behind the left knee and repeat to the left.

2. Lunges and Prayer Squat Pose. Stretch in a runner's lunge to the right and then left. Change so the lunges/legs are to the side instead of front/back. Stretch so the right leg is bent to the side and the right foot is flat on the floor, The left leg is extended side (similar to a straddle position). Hold then switch legs. Hold then switch legs. Hold then switch legs. Next, hold a prayer squat pose (in yoga) for 20 seconds.

3. Retiré with a Ball. Sit with both legs straight in front of you turned out. Place a small exercise ball (4-6 inches in diameter) under the calf of one leg. Draw that leg up to a turned out retiré while keeping the foot on the ball. Turn the retiré leg in to parallel. Turn it out again. Slide it back down. Repeat 4 to 8 reps total. Repeat all on the other side.

4. Pilates Ball Fondu. Begin standing facing the barre, standing on your left leg with the right leg extended side on top of a Pilates ball. The foot should be pointed. Fondu on the left leg while lengthening the right leg on the Pilates ball. Straighten the standing leg. Do a total of 4 reps. Then pivot so the left hand is on the barre and the right leg is extended to the front on the Pilates ball. Do 4 fondus with the leg front. Pivot to face the barre and rond de jambe the ball around so that the right leg is extended in arabesque on the ball. Fondu 4x. Repeat all on the other side.

5. Parallel Hip Work. We often think of turning out when we think of conditioning and stretching the hips. The following exercise is in parallel, but each time you plié, think about gaining more space in your hips. Stand in parallel with the feet hips' width apart. Roll down through the spine to a hamstring stretch with the legs straight. Plié deeply and slowly. Straighten the legs. Repeat. Roll up. Roll down and repeat all.

Roll down again. Plié and as you stretch, twist to the right with your right arm reaching toward the ceiling. Hold briefly. Reach both arms down to the floor as you plié. Stretch the legs. Plié and as you stretch, twist to the left with your left arm reaching toward the ceiling. Hold briefly. Reach both arms down to the floor as you plié. Roll up as you stretch the legs.

Roll down again. Squat (grand plié rather than a demi plié this time). Stretch the legs again. Walk out to downward dog. Hold the stretch briefly. Walk back to a hamstring stretch. Squat. Stretch the legs again. Walk out to downward dog. Hold the stretch briefly. Walk back to a hamstring stretch. Plié. Roll up as you straighten your legs.