



GET HIP

BRUSH UP ON A FEW TRAINING BASICS TO KEEP YOUR FLEXORS LOOSE AND STRONG SO THEY WON'T SLOW YOU DOWN.

BY ASHLEY MATEO

▶ **WHEN IT COMES TO WHICH** elements of your stride you can improve, your hips don't lie. That's because hip flexors—the muscles that allow flexion at the hip joint—play a huge role in fluid running, and a set of tight ones can really mess with your mechanics.

“The iliopsoas is the strongest group of muscles in the hip flexors, connecting the spine to the femur, and it's what helps contract and pull the thigh toward the

torso, allowing you to bring your knee toward your chest as you run,” explains Amanda Nurse, an elite marathoner, running coach, and certified yoga instructor in Boston. When running, you're regularly shortening that muscle, never lengthening it; this can lead to imbalances.

Sitting all day (think: desk job, travel) can make matters worse. “The more time we spend sitting, the more the iliopsoas shortens,” says Tom Holland, an exercise physiologist in Darien, Connecticut.

“Never before has strength-training, stretching, and mobility work been more important for runners.”

“The shorter that muscle, the shorter your stride becomes—and that throws off your natural gait, which can create compensations that lead to injury in the muscles that work to move us forward and stabilize us as we run.”

That’s why it’s crucial, now more than ever, to give your hips some TLC. “Never before has strength-training, stretching, and mobility work been more important for runners,” Holland says. “All day, we do the unnatural—sitting—and then we try to do the natural—running—and our bodies aren’t ready for it.” In order to run more efficiently (and without pain), strategically opening and strengthening your hip flexors needs to be part of your running routine.

The easiest place to start is with active warmup drills that are often underrated and underutilized, Holland says. “Two to three minutes of high knees, butt kicks, skipping, and running backward will open up the hips in the front, side, and back planes of motion,” he explains. Holland also suggests doing strength work in different planes of motion to keep all the muscles in and around your hip flexors, especially your glutes, firing correctly.

“You can’t have good hip flexion if your glutes are tight or weak,” Nurse says, “so it’s super important that you’re always stretching and strengthening the front of your hip flexor and the back, which are the glute muscles.” Unilateral exercises like step-ups and single-leg toe touches are particularly effective at strengthening the glutes, while walking lunges, lateral lunges, air squats, and jump squats will zero in on all the muscles surrounding the hips.

Whether you’re at the gym or heading out for (or back from!) a run, these five moves will strengthen and open your hips, keep them loose long-term, and not only make you a better runner, but make running feel better to you. 

GO-TO OPENERS

Running coach Amanda Nurse shares her five favorite hip stretches for runners. Do them after a run or on an off day.



Skating Squat

Stand with legs just wider than hip-width apart. Send hips back to lower into a squat. Shift weight to right leg as you rise up to standing and extend left leg back, like you’re gliding on

skates. Return to squat and repeat on opposite leg. Continue alternating for 60 seconds.

WHAT IT DOES:

Strengthens glutes and lengthens hip flexors



Low Lunge Variation

Start in a low lunge with right foot planted, knee bent, and left knee on the floor. Place palms flat on each side of right foot. Untuck left toes and lift left arm above head as you lean to right

side. Hold for five deep breaths, then repeat on the opposite side.

WHAT IT DOES:

Strengthens quads and hips, lengthens psoas



One-Legged Bridge Lift and Lower

Lie faceup with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Extend arms straight up. Press into heels to lift hips. Transfer weight to right leg and extend left leg straight out for five

breaths. Lower leg to hover over floor for five breaths, then lift it back up. Perform 8 reps, then repeat on opposite leg.

WHAT IT DOES:

Activates glutes and lengthens and strengthens hip flexors



Crescent Lunge Knee-Up

Start in high lunge with right foot forward, knee bent at 90 degrees, hips square, and toes facing forward. Lift arms straight up as you stand and draw left knee toward

chest. Return to starting position. Complete 10 reps, then repeat on opposite leg.

WHAT IT DOES:

Strengthens glutes (especially the glute medius) and hip flexors



Full-Range Figure Four

Sit upright with knees bent, hands resting behind you. Cross left ankle over right knee. Let left knee travel out to the left, then back to center. Slowly go through the range

of motion, then hold for five breaths when you feel a good stretch. Repeat on the opposite leg.

WHAT IT DOES:

Opens hip joints and stretches glutes