

By Paula Shingler, BSc, MCSP

Many people have gluteal amnesia. This is not a contagious condition but it is where our biggest muscles, the glutei or buttocks, are getting life a bit too easy and get very weak as a result. Our buttock muscles work the most when we are standing. This situation is not helped by our modern lifestyle of sitting at computers, in front of the TV and driving everywhere. “So what?” I can hear you say. Well read on and hopefully you will understand the part strong buttocks play in keeping us upright and injury free, how you can start to re-awaken those glutei that have dosed off, and how you can ensure you keep those glutei pert and performing.

Pert and performing? I like the sound of that

The three main muscles are:

1. Gluteus Maximus – This extends the leg backwards and its function is to stabilise the trunk and prevent falling forward during running, especially sprinting.
2. (&3) Gluteus medius & minimus. – They abduct (move out sideways) and rotate the hip in if it is bent up, and rotate out if the hip is straight Their function is to aid with the alignment of the femur (thigh bone), knee and ankle and to help hold the pelvis in an upright position.

Buttocks play an important role in our stability, so weakness can cause instability leading to other

areas having to compensate and, with time, overuse will lead to injury.

Weakness = instability = injury

Injuries that can occur include hamstring strains and tears, lower back pain, runners’ knee, ITB syndrome, plantar fasciitis, Achilles tendonitis, shin pain – actually all of these common “injuries” that are not the result of an accident. All these injuries can be caused by the lack of normal stability that gluts provide, and can be prevented by maintaining the power in the glutei. It is good to remember too that if you have had an accident which has altered your gait, or has meant you have not fully used one leg, then the glutei on that side may well have weakened and will need to be remembered in your rehabilitation.

How to test for weakness

A good way to test out your power is to stand and try to lift your leg back - see how long you can hold it, or if you can hold and maintain a straight position. If you can’t then there is a good chance you have some deficit. Let’s look at how you can wake up your gluts by reactivating them and then strengthening. This will also improve shape and help prevent sagging – hooray!

Go back to the basics first with these exercises:

- Actively clench your buttocks whilst sitting, hold and count to 5, then relax.

- Do the same but standing up.
- Clench, then whilst standing up, lift one leg back, hold for 5 seconds and then bring your feet together. Repeat with the other leg.
- Every time you walk anywhere, clench your buttock each time you put your heel down.

Prevention better than cure

These are good reactivating exercises and once you have a bit of life back then you can progress to bridging, bridge and lift one leg back and up, lunges, squats, step ups ...the list goes on! A professional assessment is always advised before you launch into these more arduous exercises, just in case you are not ready to advance and to ensure you are doing the exercises properly. You may cause an injury rather than prevent one, not ideal!

So if you think you may have even a suggestion of gluteal amnesia then give the basic exercises a go – easy to do and no one will even notice until, of course, these glutei are looking toned and no longer saggy. You will then know those big muscles are awake and eagerly waiting to help stabilise you so you can run swiftly through the bush - and remain injury free!

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