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# BUILDING THE GLUTEUS MEDIUS

Written By: Pete Holman

Within the first article of this glute training series, we discussed the importance of glute training and, more specifically, how to strengthen and tone the gluteus maximus (refer to the Fall 2019 issue of Iron Man Magazine). In brief, the gluteus maximus is the powerhouse of the core; enabling us to engage in the simplest of tasks like moving from a seated position to a standing position. However, for athletes, the gluteus maximus plays a larger role in allowing us to run faster and jump higher. And who can forget the importance of toning the most important muscle group on the beach?

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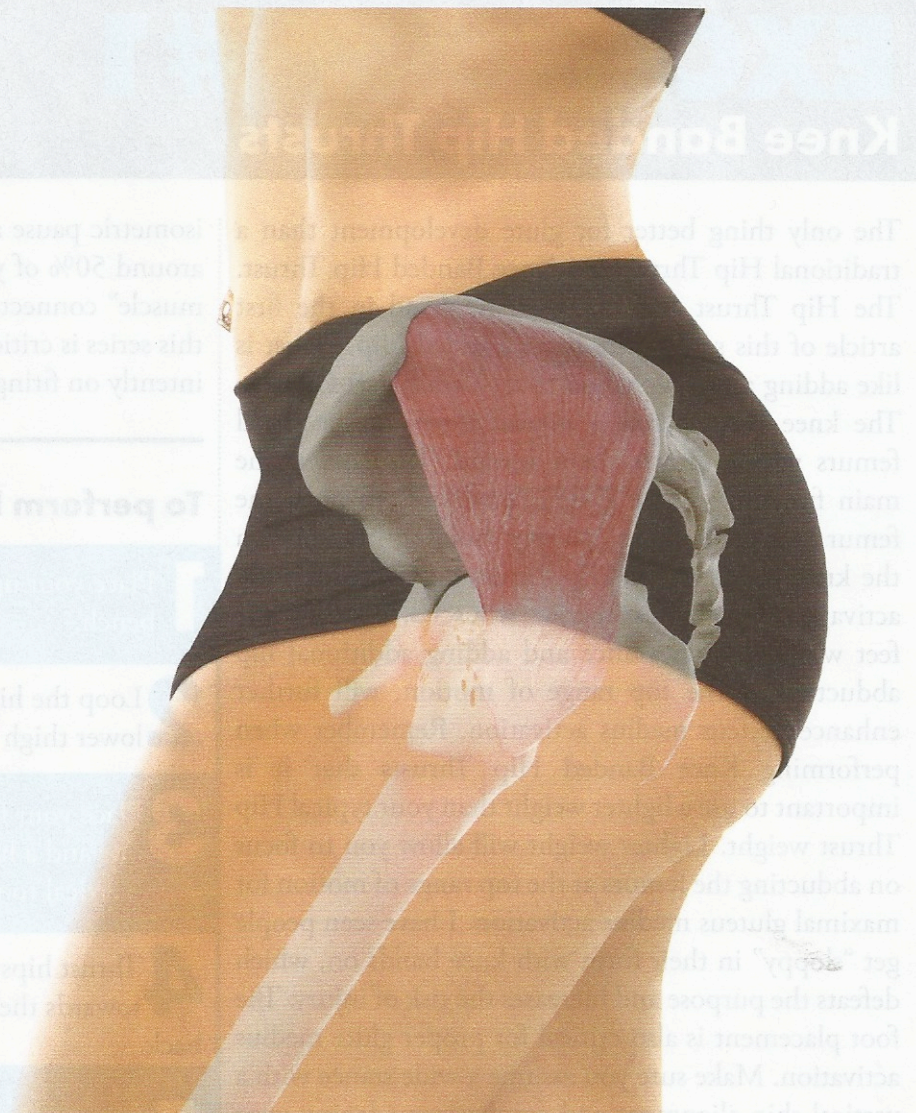




We can all agree that the gluteus maximus is critically important in strength, function and aesthetics, but are there other muscles in the glutes that need to be addressed? Within this article of the series on how to maximally train the glutes, we are going to look at a lesser known and often poorly understood muscle group on the lateral side of the pelvis called the gluteus medius.

Imagine the human body as a Formula One race car. If the gluteus maximus is the engine of the car, propelling it down the track, the suspension can be thought of as the gluteus medius muscle group. No matter how fast a race car is while driving in a straight line, at some point, the car needs to turn. Without proper suspension, the car would be unresponsive to these directional changes. Both gluteus medius muscles act as a lateral suspension system for the pelvis and are critically important for walking, running and change in direction. For bodybuilders, fitness professionals, and bikini models, the gluteus medius group helps to fill out the glutes providing volume and curvature for that "gold star" peach! Regardless of your end goal, it is imperative to understand the structure, function, and strength training parameters for the gluteus medius muscles.

The gluteus medius originates on the outer surface of the ilium between the iliac crest and posterior gluteal line and inserts on the greater trochanter of the femur (see image.) Although the anterior portion aids in internal rotation of



the hip and the lateral portion assists in external rotation, the primary function of this muscle is to abduct the leg (moving the leg away from the body) and stabilize the pelvis laterally. If you were to balance on one leg, keeping your pelvis in perfect alignment with your spine, you would be targeting the gluteus medius on the ground-based leg. If you were to then swing your opposite leg laterally, you would be firing the gluteus medius on the floating leg, making for a terrific gluteus medius training exercise with a balance focus. However, before worrying about balance, it makes sense to target the gluteus medius muscle groups in more stable positions and make sure they are firing on all cylinders.

Although there are numerous exercises that target these muscle groups, let's explore three in particular that are widely used by physical therapists and strength coaches alike. Remember, just like most things in life, focus on quality vs. quantity and you will be well on your way to improving your strength, function and creating a Georgia-worthy peach!



# EXERCISE #1

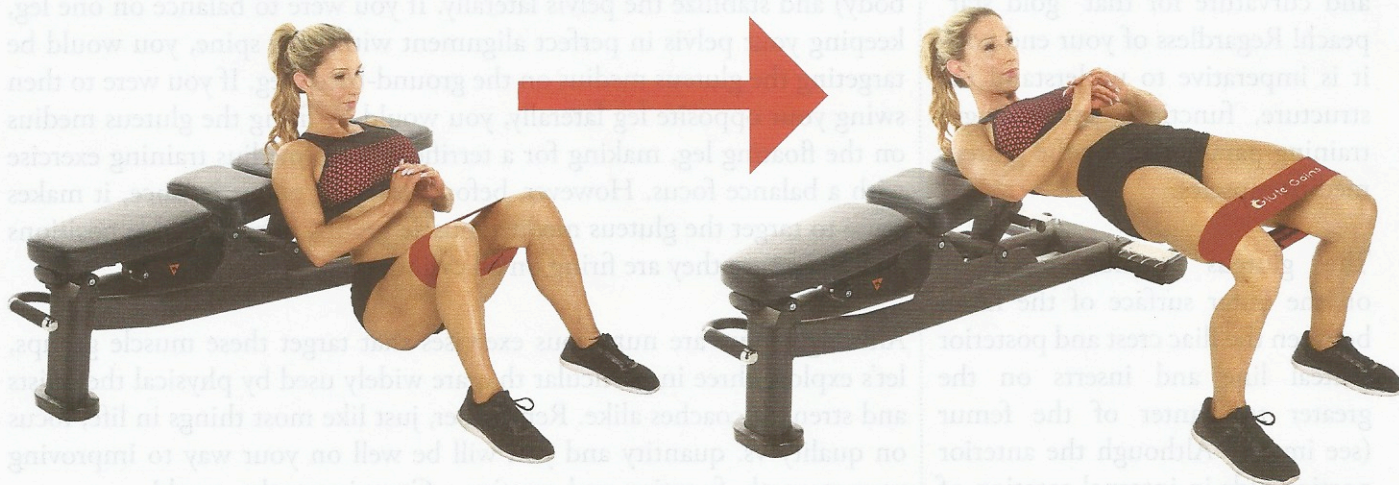
## Knee Banded Hip Thrusts

The only thing better for glute development than a traditional Hip Thrust, is a Knee Banded Hip Thrust. The Hip Thrust was discussed in detail in the first article of this series. The Knee Banded Hip Thrust is like adding a turbo-charger to an already fast Porsche. The knee band places a medial force on the distal femurs which directs them inward. Remember, the main function of the gluteus medius is to push the femur outward. Thus, simply holding tension on the knee bands in the Hip Thrust position, instantly activates the gluteus medius muscles. Placing the feet wider in your stance and adding additional hip abduction at the top range of motion, will further enhance gluteus medius activation. Remember when performing Knee Banded Hip Thrusts that it is important to use a lighter weight than your typical Hip Thrust weight. Lighter weight will allow you to focus on abducting the femurs at the top range of motion for maximal gluteus medius activation. I have seen people get “sloppy” in their form with knee bands on, which defeats the purpose and increases the risk of injury. The foot placement is also critical for proper glute medius activation. Make sure you assume a wide stance with a vertical shin alignment and emphasize widening your thighs at the top range of motion for best results. I recommend performing 3-4 sets of 15 reps with an

isometric pause at the top range of motion and using around 50% of your one rep max weight. The “mind-muscle” connection talked about in the first article of this series is critically important for this exercise; think intently on firing the lateral glutes.

### To perform Knee Banded Hip Thrusts:

- 1 Place your upper back (base of the scapula) on the bench.
- 2 Loop the hip circle/knee bands around your lower thigh (just above the knee-caps.)
- 3 Place your feet in a wide stance (approximately one and a half times your shoulder width) with shins vertical to the floor.
- 4 Thrust hips upward while tucking your chin towards the chest. Be sure not to extend the low back.
- 5 Pause at the top range of motion for 1-3 seconds while driving your thighs outward.





# EXERCISE #2

## Banded Side Plank

The side plank is a gold standard exercise prescribed by strength and conditioning coaches and physical therapists worldwide. In fact, spine researcher and core performance expert, Dr. Stuart McGill has it as one of his “Big Three” exercises he uses with essentially everyone starting a core performance or spine health program. The Banded Side Plank builds on the lateral stabilization theme by challenging the gluteus medius muscle groups to hold an abducted leg position for time. The ankle bands place tremendous stress on the gluteus medius and will ensure a complete “smoke show” of your lateral hips when finished. For individuals with knees that collapse inward while performing Squats or Deadlifts, this is a great exercise to help correct that dysfunction. Keep in mind that this is a more advanced drill. Make sure you can nail a Side Plank with hip abduction prior to adding the bands and start with the lightest band available (this drill is harder than it looks.) I recommend performing 3-5 sets of 10 second holds on each side, with minimal rest between sets, then switching to the other side to balance everything

out. Think about creating maximum tension through the glutes and maintaining a stiff and rigid plank.

### To perform Banded Side Planks:

- 1** Place a band around both ankles.
- 2** Stack your supporting arm at a 90 degree angle under your torso with feet atop one another.
- 3** Brace the core and lift your body off the ground so you are straight as a “plank” from the side view.
- 4** Lift the “up” leg into abduction stretching out the band. Be sure to keep your head, spine, pelvis and legs in perfect alignment.
- 5** Slowly lower yourself back towards the ground at the end of the time interval.





# EXERCISE #3

## Suitcase Carry

Have you ever carried a heavy suitcase through the airport, or like me, use a hand-basket at the grocery store thinking you will only pick up a couple items yet end up with enough food to feed a small army? If so, I don't need to tell you how demanding the suitcase carry is! Although, I love this exercise for core and grip strength, some of its greatest benefactors are the gluteus medius muscle group. The glute medius supports the pelvis laterally while on a single leg, such as walking or marching. Thus, by adding weight in one arm, the ground-based gluteus medius has to work tremendously hard to laterally stabilize the pelvis (remember the race

car suspension analogy). The longer the time is spent on one leg, the more gluteus medius activation. The key to this drill is consciously thinking about firing the ground-based gluteus medius, holding the pelvis in a perfectly neutral position, and maintaining a tall spine posture. A common mistake is using so much weight that you have to lean away from the weighted hand to find your balance. Walk slowly and confidently and you will soon have the strength of a lion and the glutes of an NFL running back. I recommend starting with a weight that is approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your body weight. Perform 3 sets of 30 second walk times on each side.

### To perform the Suitcase Carry:

**1** Assume a tall spine posture and brace your core. Grab the weight without twisting your spine or bending from the low back.

**2** Walk in a straight line while maintaining posture. (If your gym is crowded, march in place.)

Targeting the lateral glutes will help your Formula One car perform on the track and will round out that peach for the beach. However, if you want the hat-trick, or trifecta of glute training programs, check out the next issue of Iron Man Magazine for the third and final article in this series which will focus on the often-forgotten external rotators of the glutes. Train hard, focus on form and work those glutes!



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Pete Holman, CSCS**, has a Master of Science Degree in Physical Therapy. He is an inventor of functional exercise equipment, including the Nautilus Glute Drive and TRX Rip Trainer, and a former US National TaeKwon-Do champion and team captain.

