



For Strong, Toned Legs, It's A Balancing Act

Luci Gabel
MA, MBA, ACSM, ACE

Legs are an incredibly important part of the body: We stand on them, walk with them, and sit with them. Some of us require them to jog, peddle, kick, or even sprint. They do so much to make our lives what they are!

How much we can do with our legs is a direct result of how strong and flexible they are. The health of our hips, knees and ankles also depends on the muscles of our legs. Back pain, hip pain, and knee pain can come from weak or inflexible leg muscles. Are you doing your part to keep them strong?

An excellent exercise for your overall leg that doesn't require any equipment is the lunge. Lunges strengthen the quadriceps (front of the thigh), hamstrings (back of the thigh), inner and outer thigh, and glutes (derriere); and they stretch the calves. Performed regularly, lunges will shape the thighs and lift the derriere. Because the activity is done on one leg, they're an excellent way to improve balance.

If you're new to lunges, include them in your exercise routine 1 to 2 times per week for 6 weeks and see the difference they make! If you start with the steps provided below, you'll find that lunges are simple, pain-free, and everyone can do them.

The Lunge: If you haven't done lunges before, place one hand on a wall, a table, or a chair for support. Step one foot back and one foot forward in a long stride position. Then, bend both knees as if you were going to kneel on one knee, but don't go to the ground. Bend your knees as far as you feel comfortable, then keep the feet in place and straighten back up to your stride position. Repeat 10 times, and then slowly increase until you can do 20 times on each leg.

To keep your knees safe when doing lunges, there are four important points to remember:

- 1.) Make sure your knees are pointing the same direction as your toes throughout the exercise.
- 2.) When you bend your knees, make sure the front knee doesn't move past the toes on your front foot. Instead, keep it in line with your ankle.
- 3.) Put your weight into your front heel when moving up and down. This keeps unnecessary pressure out of the knees.
- 4.) Bend your knee only as far as it feels comfortable and don't bend past ninety-degrees. At the lowest part of the lunge, your knee should not be touching the ground. If your knee hurts, you may be bending too far.

Increasing the Intensity

Start with 10 or so repetitions on each leg and slowly build up to 20 repetitions over several days or weeks. Once you can do more than 20 repetitions at one level, move to the next level.



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Level 2.) Start in the same stride position as above, then bend at the knees. When coming up to standing position bring the back leg forward to meet the front, heels and toes together.

Level 3.) Do the lunge without holding on to anything. At first you may find it quite challenging in terms of balance.

Level 4.) Once you can do 20 lunges without holding on to a wall or a chair, and it feels like your legs are ready for a more challenging workout, take a weight into each hand.

It's recommended that you talk to your doctor before starting to workout. This is basic exercise information for the general public. If you have injuries or other physical limitations, this exercise may not be appropriate. A good rule of thumb: If it doesn't feel good- don't do it!

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