



Are the Glutes really KING?

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Listen to most of the “catch phrases” going around, the modern training trends and the general idea behind movement principles today and it won’t take long before you start hearing something about the gluteus muscle group. “They are the biggest, most important muscles in your body – so use them!” “The glutes are key.” “If you strengthen your glutes everything will fall into place.” “Your glutes aren’t firing properly.” I, myself, have been caught up in this. It makes so much sense. Research has correlated weak or poor gluteal functioning with many injuries from lower back pain, to knee ailments, to ITB and many, many others. The glutes seem to rule the body to a certain extent, especially in sporting activities... But do they really??

Let me try to, firstly, explain all the fuss...

In short, too many people (athletes included) have weak or dysfunctional gluteal muscles. And due to the leverage advantage they have over your legs, the glutes should always be the primary muscles that drive lower body movement. It doesn’t matter whether you are a golfer, a triathlete or just a weekend fun-seeker, your glutes are undoubtedly

important if you want to move efficiently. So where or why does it all go slightly haywire?

There are two main reasons:

1. Inhibited glutes (Reciprocal inhibition)

In this situation the gluteal muscles are neurologically shut down and do not contract effectively. The body is amazing in the way it protects muscles by relaxing them when the opposite (antagonist) muscle is contracted or tightened. This is a built in injury prevention mechanism that we cannot control. When we look at the hip area, specifically, the glutes are often inhibited in this way and unable to perform their primary functions due to the excessive activation of its antagonist, the hip flexors (particularly the iliopsoas). Our modern lifestyles, the amount of sitting we do on a daily basis and the general lack of effective stretching leaves them almost permanently in a shortened position which becomes “normal”. As the hip flexor group shortens, it pulls on the pelvis and the ideal neutral pelvic posture (in which the glutes are most effective) becomes compromised, creating either an anterior or posterior pelvic tilt.

2. Relative glute weakness (Synergistic dominance)

Here the glutes DO fire correctly, but are not as strong as other lower body muscles (eg. quadriceps), thus the body will naturally use the stronger muscles to do what the glutes SHOULD be doing, resulting in inefficient performances and compensation patterns. Even when performing exercises or movements aimed at strengthening the glutes (squats, lunges, deadlifts, etc.), the majority of the work will be done by the strongest muscle groups involved. (Natural body structure and technique employed during exercise will obviously also affect this dominance.) What happens is that people who don't have *naturally* great glute activation patterns and don't have *naturally* good muscle balance (ie. glutes stronger than thighs) get in the gym and do exercises that SHOULD target the glutes, but end up emphasizing their imbalances and strengthening the strongest muscle group. You need to be strong, but you need strength in the right places – efficiency reduces injury risk.

Looking at these two more closely, we see that they go hand in hand, as well as in isolation, because the hip flexor muscle group includes the anterior thigh muscles, meaning that if the glutes are RELATIVELY weak, chances are often good that the hip flexors will be either overactive, or tight, or both. So thats easy then – just stretch the hip flexors and problem solved? Well.. No. What if the hip flexors are weak or lacking in optimal strength?

To have optimal glute activation, you need good femoral control. *Femoral control* means the muscles that attach on the upper thigh bone from up around the waist (the psoas and glutes) should be fully in control of the thigh bone, rather than those that attach lower, such as the TFL. This correctly pulls the head of the femur tight into the hip socket preventing excessive movement. If the hip flexors (particularly psoas) is weak, flexing the hip will be done by the muscles that attach lower down on the hip and thigh end up doing the work. This often leads to a

posterior hip tilt and sacrifices good activation patterns for activation of the TFL and hamstrings – also affecting the positioning of the femur head in the hip socket.

So all in all... The topic of glute activation and the practice of prescribing a ton of glute activation exercises is very popular these days but if you create the proper posture and have the right muscle balance you won't need to use glute activation exercises because the glutes will naturally activate. The key is getting your body

working efficiently so that ALL your movements are driven by the correct muscles.

Are the GLUTES king? YES!!! But the HIP FLEXORS are queen – and she is very much the controlling factor behind the large and powerful king....

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