

6 Body + Soul

Why men need to work out like women

They're obsessed with push-ups and beefing up their arms — but men should be doing 'girlie' exercises too, says [Peta Bee](#)

Walk into any fitness studio and the gender bias is obvious: men are still more likely to be found working on their upper

body "mirror muscles" in the free weights section, building pecs and perfect biceps. Meanwhile the queue forming for the spin class remains predominantly female and women tend to be obsessed with working their legs, bums and tums.

Yet experts say that we need to change that. By missing out the more typically feminine end of the workout spectrum, men are increasing their chances of injury by neglecting important muscles. "Given the hours some men dedicate to working out, they are less fit than they should be," says personal trainer Matt Roberts. It's time for them to buck convention and embrace workouts that are often considered "girlie", that focus heavily on legs, bums and flexibility. "Men often neglect the muscles that they can't see in the mirror, such as the back, hamstrings and gluteal muscles, and tend to steer clear of doing enough cardiovascular work", Roberts says.

"You tend to see a lot of men lifting to improve their pectoral muscles in the chest and underusing their back and shoulder muscles, which can result in a classic forward-stooping, 'chest heavy' posture," he says. Even when they do work on their legs, there's a tendency

for men to bulk up the quadriceps muscles at the front of the thighs, which can throw the body off-kilter. "There's also a higher risk of injuring your hamstrings when playing sports if they are weak". Not working out smaller muscles such as the calves can also "raise the potential for greater achilles and knee issues", Roberts says.

Allyn Condon, a former Olympic sprinter, now fitness director of the Gym Group in Bristol, says he sees daily evidence of exercise imbalance among men. He advises that men should "introduce exercises like glute bridge raises and Nordic curls which men struggle with as they require strong abdominal and buttock muscles."

In contrast, the female approach to exercise is often all-encompassing, and healthier because "they work a balanced range of muscle groups," says Scott Laidler, a personal trainer with a studio at the Pinewood film studios in Buckinghamshire. "Women want a toned bottom and back, which means they focus more on the hamstrings, glutes and shoulders that men overlook."

While both sexes seek a toned and flat stomach, they do it in different ways. "Men tend to be aesthetically inspired by a ripped torso, which can be achieved with a limited repertoire of exercises, whereas women are more inclined to do core-training classes for a toned and functional midriff," Laidler says. "In terms of avoiding back pain and structural issues, it's far better to work



Celebrity fitness trainer Matt Roberts says glute and thigh exercises are not just for women

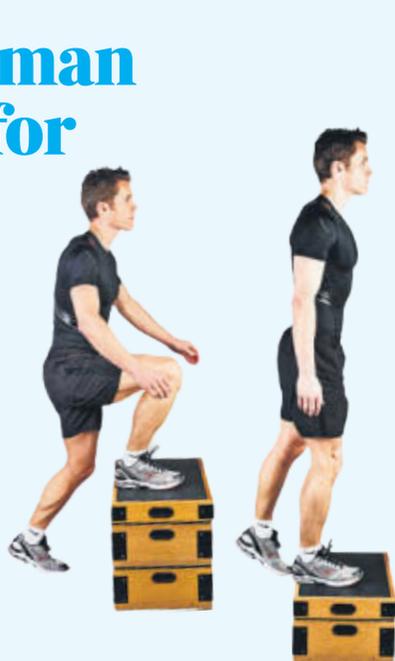
the full range of muscles in the trunk in the female way." Men should also be signing up to female-dominated classes such as Pilates and yoga as they "are naturally less supple" than women, Roberts says. Sarah Ramsden, a yoga teacher who works with top football clubs including Manchester United, says a lot of men struggle when they take up yoga. "They can be very fit, but struggle with the breathing control and specific muscular effort of yoga challenging," she says. However, now that top male athletes such as Andy Murray and Rory

McIlroy have gushed about the huge fitness benefits that yoga and Pilates bring, and spoken about how much yoga has helped their performance, the perception is changing. Women, of course, have their workout downfalls too. They tend to avoid heavy weights and circuit training, and, Roberts says, "are still underrepresented in team sports like football and tennis". The aim is to get to a stage where no workout is either too butch or girlie. "Elite sportspeople have grabbed this concept and run with it," Laidler says. "We should do the same."

Are you man enough for lunges?

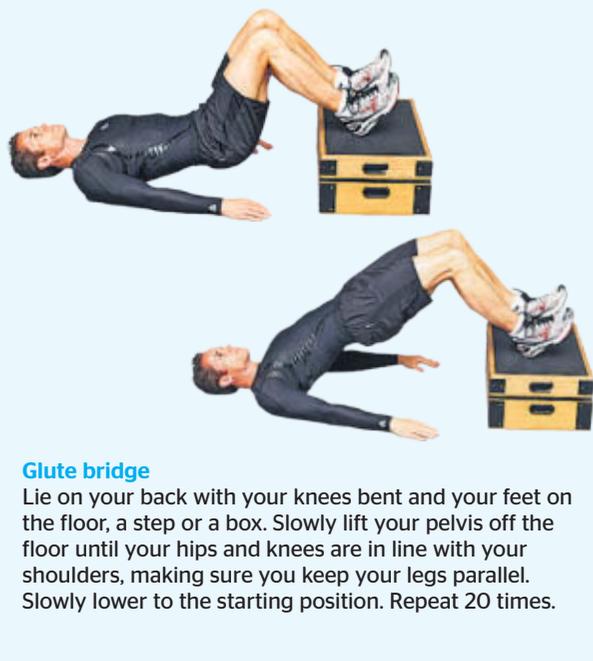
Step-up with stair

Stand with one foot on a bench or stair and your other leg on the floor. Step up with the lower leg and follow through, bringing the knee to a right angle. Return to the start position. Repeat 20 times on each leg.



Glute bridge

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the floor, a step or a box. Slowly lift your pelvis off the floor until your hips and knees are in line with your shoulders, making sure you keep your legs parallel. Slowly lower to the starting position. Repeat 20 times.



Reverse lunge

Start in a standing position on a stair or bench with your back straight and your feet shoulder-width apart. Step backwards, bending both knees to 90 degrees and maintaining a straight torso. Stretch both arms above your head — you should feel a stretch in your hip flexors and shoulder/upper-back area. Push straight back to the starting position. Repeat 20 times on each leg.

