



Head & Knee Lifts

The Head & Knee Lifts allow you to release and regain control of your back, neck, and gluteal muscles. The exercise involves lying on the stomach, lifting the head, and lifting the head and knees at the same time with the knees bent. This exercise helps to relieve back pain and neck pain.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTION

Starting Position: Lie down on your stomach on your carpet or exercise mat. Bring both hands under your forehead, palms down, and rest your forehead on your hands.

Movement: Inhale into your lower belly so that it presses down into the floor, and at the same time gently lift up your head. Then lower down as slowly as you can, slowly releasing your lower back muscles, and rest your forehead on your hands.

This time as you inhale into your lower belly and lift up your head, see if you can let your lower back arch and your tailbone stick up in the air a little bit. Then slowly release your lower back, and lower your head and tailbone down as slowly and with as much control as you possibly can.

Now take a deep breath up into your chest and lift up your head. Really expand your chest and stick it forward. You can gently press your hips into the floor to help you lift up. Then release down as slowly as you can, and relax.

Bend both your knees, so that your feet come up in the air and your knees are on the floor. There should be a 90 degree angle at your knees. Slowly and gently lift your right knee off the floor, so that your right foot presses up toward the ceiling. Then lower your knee down as slowly as you can. Now, inhale down into your lower belly and lift your right knee at the same time as your head. Then lower both your head and your knee down as slowly as you can.

Now slowly and gently lift your left knee up in the air. Then very slowly lower your knee back down to the floor. Now, inhale down into your belly and lift up your head and left knee at the same time. Then release your head and knee down to the floor as slowly and with as much control as you can.

Lastly, inhale down into your belly, and lift your head and both knees off the floor. Be gentle, and only lift as high as is comfortable for you. Then release and lower down as slowly as you can. When your head and both knees are on the floor, very slowly lower your feet back down to the floor, and relax.

ANATOMY OF HEAD & KNEE LIFTS

The Head & Knee Lifts works with all of the muscles that extend the spine (see *Trail Guide to the Body* for a complete list of vertebral column extensors and cervical spine extensors) and the gluteus maximus.

CONDITIONS HELPED BY THE HEAD & KNEE LIFTS

The Head & Knee Lifts help to alleviate the following conditions by releasing and restoring control to the extensor muscles of the back and neck, and the gluteals:

- Back pain
- Neck pain
- Disc problems
- Hyperlordosis
- Sciatica

HOW TO TEACH THE HEAD & KNEE LIFTS

Get the student in their starting position. The student should lie down on their stomach on their carpet or exercise mat. Instruct your student to bring both hands under their forehead, palms down, and to rest their forehead on their hands.

Invite the student to close their eyes. Closing their eyes removes all the visual information that their brain would otherwise have to process. Keeping the eyes closed allows the student to focus completely on their internal sensations.

Teach the lifting of the head. Instruct your student to inhale down into their lower belly so that it presses down into the floor, and at the same time to lift up their head. Ask them to notice their lower back muscles gently contracting. Then the student should release and lower down as slowly as they can, and rest their forehead on their hands.

This time as you talk your student through the movement, ask them to let their lower back arch and their tailbone stick up in the air a little bit as they lift up their head. Then they should release and lower down as slowly as possible, slowly letting their tailbone come down.

In the last head lift, instruct your student to take a deep breath up into their chest, letting their chest expand and stick forward, as they lift up their head. The student can gently press their hips into the floor to help them lift up. Then the student should release and lower down as slowly as possible.

Teach the lifting of the head and each knee. Instruct your student to bend their knees so that their feet come up in the air. Their knees should still be on the floor, and their knees should be bent at 90 degree angles. Instruct your student to first lift just their right knee off the floor, so that their right foot presses up toward the ceiling. Ask them to notice their right gluteal muscles contracting. Then they can slowly release their gluteals to let their knee come down, keeping it bent.

Then instruct your student to inhale down into their lower belly and at the same time lift their right knee and head off the floor. Ask them to notice all the muscles working in the back of their neck, their entire back, and gluteals. Then they can release and lower their head and knee down as slowly as they possibly can.

Repeat this sequence with lifting the left leg.

Teach the lifting of the head with both knees. Only teach this part if you feel that your student will be able to do it comfortably. Instruct your student to inhale down into their lower belly and at the same time lift their head and both knees off the floor, only as high as is comfortable. Then they should release and lower down as slowly as they possibly can. Once their head and knees have reached the floor, they can very slowly lower their feet back down to the floor, and relax.

The following is an example of how I teach the Head Lifts:

Lie down on your stomach on your carpet or exercise mat. Bring both hands under your forehead, palms down, and rest your forehead on your hands.

Inhale into your lower belly so that it presses down into the floor, and at the same time gently lift up your head. Try to let your lower back muscles do most of the work in this movement. You don't have to lift your head very high - just a few inches is fine. Then lower down as slowly as you can, slowly releasing your lower back muscles, and rest your forehead on your hands.

Now bring one hand to your lower back, leaving the other hand where it is, with your forehead still resting on it. With the hand at your lower back, follow your vertebrae down to the very base of your spine, so that you can feel your tailbone and get a sense of where it is. Then you can bring your hand to your lower back and let it rest there, or bring it back under your forehead.

This time as you inhale into your lower belly and lift up your head, see if you can let your lower back arch and your tailbone stick up in the air a little bit. Notice your lower back muscles contracting. Then when you're ready, slowly release your lower back, and lower your head and tailbone down as slowly and with as much control as you possibly can.

If you have your hand on your lower back, bring it back under your forehead, so your forehead is resting on both hands. This time take a deep breath up into your chest as you lift up your head. Really expand your chest and stick it forward. You can gently press your hips into the floor to help you lift up. Then when you're ready, release down as slowly as you can, and relax.

Now, bend both your knees, so that your feet come up in the air and your knees are on the ground. There should be a 90 degree angle at your knees. Slowly and gently lift your right knee off the floor, so that your right foot presses up toward the ceiling. Notice your gluteal muscles on your right side contracting. Then release and lower your knee down as slowly as you can. We'll do this just once more, and this time you're going to lift your head at the same time. When you're ready, inhale into your lower belly and lift your right knee at the same time as your head. Notice the muscles in the back of your neck, your entire back, and your gluteals contracting. Then release and lower both your head and your knee down as slowly as you can.

Let's do that on the left side. First, keeping your head on the floor, slowly and gently lift your left knee up in the air. Feel your gluteal muscles on your left side contract as you lift up. Then very slowly release and lower your knee back down to the floor. When you're ready, inhale into your belly and lift up your head and left knee. Notice the muscles in the back of your neck, your entire back, and your gluteals contracting. Then release your head and knee down as slowly and with as much control as you can.

We'll just do one more movement in this position, and we'll only do it once. When you're ready, inhale into your belly, and lift your head and both knees off the floor. Be gentle, and only lift as high as is comfortable for you. Then release and lower down as slowly as you can. When your head and both knees are on the floor, very slowly lower your feet back down to the floor, and relax.