



Hip Directions

Hip Directions allow you to release and gain control of the muscles of your waist, lower back, and hips. The Hip Directions exercise involves lying on one side (like in the Side Curl), and sliding the top hip up and down, forward and backward, and in circles. This exercise helps to coordinate the movement of walking, and relieves functional leg length discrepancy, idiopathic scoliosis, and hip pain.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTION

Starting Position: Lie down on your left side on your carpet or exercise mat. Bend your knees up in front of you as if you're setting up for the Side Curl. Rest your head on your left arm; either stretch your left arm out straight above your head, or bend your left arm and rest your head in the crook of your elbow. If it is not comfortable to rest your head on your arm, you can use a small pillow. Just make sure that your head, neck, and spine remain in a straight line. Make sure your torso isn't rolling forward or rolling backward. Bring your thighs to a 90 degree angle with your torso, and your lower legs to a 90 degree angle with your thighs. Rest your right hand on the floor in front of you, and let your right arm relax and be bent at about 90 degrees, with your right elbow resting on the right side of your stomach.

First Movement: Slide your right hip up toward your right armpit. Only slide it as high as is comfortable for you. Keep your legs completely relaxed. Feel the gentle contraction of the muscles on the right side of your waist. Then, release them as slowly and as gently as you can to let your hip come back to where you started.

Now that your hip is at that neutral starting point, slide it in the opposite direction, down toward your feet. You should feel some gentle contraction in the muscles along the left side of your waist. Now very slowly, gently release these muscles to let your hip come back to neutral. Don't pull your hip up; just release the contraction and allow your hip to slide back to neutral.

Repeat this sequence a few times: slide your hip up, slowly release to neutral, then slide downward, and slowly release to neutral. Move as slowly and as smoothly as you can.

Second Movement: Now you'll work with the forward and backward movement of your hip. Keep your legs completely relaxed and just focus on the movement of your

hip. Your knee will move forward and backward as a result of your hip moving, but your feet should stay stacked on top of each other.

Slowly press your right hip forward. When you have pressed it as far forward as you want to, very slowly release and let your hip slide back to neutral. Now, slowly slide your hip backward. When you've pressed it as far back as you want to, slowly release it back to neutral. Repeat this sequence several times, moving as slowly and as smoothly as you can.

Hip Circles: Start by sliding your hip up toward your armpit. Now very slowly start moving your hip forward. Continue moving in that direction and move your hip down toward your feet. Then continue the circle and press your hip back behind you. Then slowly finish up the circle, bringing your hip up toward your armpit. Do one more circle in this direction at your own pace. When you're done with that circle, slowly let your hip slide back to neutral.

Now you can do circles in the other direction. Start by sliding your hip up toward your armpit. Then start moving your hip backward. Then move your hip down toward your feet, then forward, then up toward your armpit. Do one more circle in this direction. When you're done with that circle, slowly let your hip slide back to neutral.

When you're done, practice this series of movements on your other side.

ANATOMY OF HIP DIRECTIONS

Hip Directions allow you to release and regain control of the muscles that laterally flex the spine, laterally tilt the pelvis, and rotate the spine:

- Quadratus lumborum
- Internal and external obliques
- Erector spinae group
- Intertransversarii
- Psoas

CONDITIONS HELPED BY HIP DIRECTIONS

Hip Directions addresses the following conditions by releasing involuntary muscle contraction in the muscles that laterally flex the spine, laterally tilt the pelvis, and rotate the spine:

- Idiopathic scoliosis
- Functional leg length discrepancy
- Sciatica

Lower back tightness and pain
Lumbar disc problems
Bursitis in the hip
Misalignment of the hip, knee, and ankle
Hip, knee, and ankle pain

HOW TO TEACH HIP DIRECTIONS

Get the student in their starting position. Instruct the student to lie on their left side. They can rest their right palm on the floor in front of them, and relax their right arm. They can rest their head on their left arm, with the arm either bent or straight. If that is not comfortable, they can put a small pillow under their head. Just make sure that their head and neck are in line with the rest of their spine. Their knees should be bent up in front of them as if they are sitting in a chair, with their thighs at a 90° angle to their torso, and their lower legs at a 90° angle to their thighs. Watch the student as they perform this exercise and make sure that they always return to this starting position after each set of movements. Take a moment to explain to the student *why* the starting position is so important: because it allows them to work with their obliques, quadratus lumborum, and psoas in the most effective way.

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 first movement. Instruct your student to slide their right hip up toward their right armpit, and to notice what muscles they feel contracting along their right waist. They should let their legs be completely relaxed, and their feet should stay stacked on top of each other. Tell them to release as slowly as possible to let their hip come back to neutral. Now instruct your student to slide their right hip down toward their feet. Ask them to notice if they feel a gentle contraction along the left side of their waist. Tell them to release as slowly as possible to let their hip come back to neutral. When they've reached neutral, instruct them to slide their hip upward and downward like this several more times, always releasing as slowly as possible, finding neutral each time, and leaving their legs completely relaxed.

Teach the second movement. Instruct your student to slide their right hip forward. Their right knee will slide forward a little, but their feet should stay stacked on top of each other. Then tell them to release as slowly as possible to let their hip come back to neutral. Then instruct your student to slide their right hip backward. Their right knee will slide backward a little, but their feet should stay stacked on top of each other. Then tell them to release as slowly as possible to let their hip come back to neutral. When they've reached neutral, instruct them to slide their hip forward and backward like this several more times, always releasing as slowly as possible, finding neutral each time, and leaving their legs completely relaxed.

Teach the hip circles. Talk your student through two forward circles with their right hip, starting by sliding their right hip up toward their right armpit. They should move as slowly and as consciously as possible. When they're done, talk your student through two backward circles with their right hip, starting by sliding their right hip up toward their right armpit.

When they've finished their hip circles, ask them to gently roll onto their back, and then onto their right side. Get them set up to do the exercise with their left hip.

Common mistakes:

One common mistake in practicing the Hip Directions is getting out of the starting position in some way. Staying in that position with 90° angles at the hips and knees is very important for working with the obliques, QL, and psoas in the most effective way. If the legs extend longer (increasing the angles at the hips and knees), the student will end up arching their back and engaging their back muscles to help them do the movements. If the knees are brought in closer to the chest (this is not very common), the student will be engaging the rectus abdominis muscle. Make sure your student understands the importance of maintaining the 90° starting position.

A very common mistake is actively moving the top leg along with the working hip. Keep an eye out for this, and keep reminding your student to keep their legs relaxed, and their feet stacked on top of each other. Their top knee will move a little as their hip moves, but the knee is just along for the ride. The only active movement is that of the working hip.

Since gravity is not helping with the release of these movements, there can be a tendency for students to actively *bring* their hip back to their neutral starting position. If they do this, they will not get the benefit of the movement. Tell your student to focus on releasing their muscles to *allow* their hip to come back to neutral. Counting can help students slow down during the release.

Remind your student to always release completely before doing the next movement. If they don't, then they're teaching themselves to hold on to some unnecessary tension in order to stay "prepared" for the next movement. This is not necessary, nor is it beneficial.

There is a tendency to want to rush through the hip circles because they are a mental challenge. You can count for your student or encourage them to count to 16 or more as they do each circle. Encourage your student to try to do each circle more slowly than the last one.

The following is an example of how I teach Hip Directions:

Gently come down to the floor, and lie down on your left side on your carpet or exercise mat. Bend your knees up in front of you as if you're setting up for the Side Curl. You can rest your head on your left arm – either stretch your left arm out straight above your head (so that your left arm is in a straight line with your spine), or bend your left arm and rest your head in the crook of your elbow. If it is not comfortable to rest your head on your arm, you can use a small pillow. Just make sure that your head, neck and spine remain in a straight line.

Make sure your torso isn't rolling forward or rolling backward – get right up there on your left side. Bring your thighs to a 90 degree angle with your torso, and your lower legs to a 90 degree angle with your thighs. Rest your right hand on the floor in front of you, and let your right arm relax and be bent at about 90 degrees, with your right elbow resting on the right side of your stomach.

First, slide your right hip up toward your right armpit. Only slide it as high as is comfortable for you. Keep your legs completely relaxed. Feel the gentle contraction of the muscles on the right side of your waist. Then, release them as slowly and as gently as you can to let your hip come back to where you started.

Now that your hip is at that neutral starting point, go ahead and slide it in the opposite direction, down toward your feet. You should feel some gentle contraction in the muscles along the left side of your waist. Now very slowly, gently release these muscles to let your hip come back to neutral. Don't pull your hip up, just release the contraction and allow your hip to slide back to neutral.

Go ahead and repeat this sequence a few times, moving as slowly and as smoothly as you can. Remember, don't pull your hip back to neutral each time – just allow it to come back to neutral by releasing.

When you're done, slowly let your hip come back to neutral.

Now you'll work with the forward and backward movement of your hip. Keep your legs completely relaxed and just focus on the movement of your hip. Your right knee will move forward and backward as a result of your hip moving, but your feet should stay stacked on top of each other.

Slowly press your right hip forward. When you've pressed it as far forward as you want to, very slowly release and let your hip slide back to neutral.

Now, slowly slide your right hip backward. When you've pressed it as far back as you want to, slowly release it back to neutral.

Repeat this sequence several times, moving as slowly and as smoothly as you can.

When you're done, allow your hip to come back to neutral.

Now that you've explored the movement of your hip in these four basic directions, you can explore a larger range of motion by doing some hip circles. You can make these circles as small or as large as you want to. Start by sliding your hip up toward your armpit. Now very slowly start moving your hip forward. Continue moving in that direction and move your hip down toward your feet. Then continue the circle and press your hip back behind you. Then slowly finish up the circle, bringing your hip up toward your armpit. Now go ahead and do one more circle in this direction at your own pace.

When you're done with that second circle, slowly let your hip slide back to neutral.

Now you can do circles in the other direction. Start by sliding your hip up toward your armpit. Then start moving your hip backward. See how smooth you can make this circle. Move your hip down toward your feet, then forward, then up toward your armpit. Go ahead and do one more circle in this direction.

When you're done with that circle, slowly let your hip slide back to neutral.

When you're ready, gently roll onto your right side. Bend your knees up in front of you at 90 degrees, and rest your head on your right arm or on a pillow in whatever way is comfortable for you.

(Teach movement sequence with the left hip.)