



Seated Hamstring Release

The Seated Hamstring Release allows you to release and regain control of your hamstrings and lower back muscles. The exercise is practiced by sitting on the floor with the legs stretched out in front, holding the bottom of one foot, and slowly bending and straightening that leg. This exercise helps to relieve lower back pain, tightness in the hamstrings, knee pain, plantar fasciitis, and Achilles tendinitis.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTION

Starting Position: Sit down on your carpet or exercise mat. If you're sitting on a mat, move down to the end of it so that your legs are on the floor in front of you. If you're on a hardwood floor, you should put on socks for this movement. If you're on a carpet, you may find this easier to do without socks.

Start by sitting up straight with both legs extended straight out in front of you. If your hamstrings are tight and this is uncomfortable, you can put a small pillow or towel under one knee while you work with the other leg. You can start by putting the pillow or towel under your left knee.

Movement: Bend your right knee and slide your right foot toward you. Flex your right foot, leaving your heel on the floor, and bring your hands underneath your right foot. Interlace your fingers and let your foot rest in your hand.

Very slowly and gently, let your right heel start sliding forward on the floor, slowly extending your right leg and gently pushing your right foot into your hand. Let your upper body relax forward as you do this. Don't go very far this first time - just 6-12 inches. Your leg will still be bent quite a bit. Then start coming back, slowly dragging your heel toward you, and sitting up straighter as you do this.

When you've come back up as far as you want to, start slowly sliding your right foot away again, letting your right heel be heavy into the floor. Let your back, neck, and head relax over your right leg as you slide it down. Your heel might go just a little farther this time.

Keep doing this a few more times, allowing your heel to slide a little farther each time, but only if it feels comfortable. Focus on moving slowly, letting your heel be heavy into the floor, and allowing your back and hamstrings to gently relax each time you slide your foot down.

When you're done, take your hands out from under your foot and let your right leg extend. Then practice this movement with your left leg.

ANATOMY OF THE SEATED HAMSTRING RELEASE

The Seated Hamstring Release works primarily with the following muscles:

- Hamstrings
- Erector spinae group
- Transversospinalis group
- Intertransversarii
- Interspinalis

CONDITIONS HELPED BY THE SEATED HAMSTRING RELEASE

The Seated Hamstring Release helps to alleviate the following conditions:

- Lower back tension and pain
- Hyperlordosis
- Tight hamstrings
- Knee pain
- Plantar fasciitis
- Achilles tendinitis

HOW TO TEACH THE SEATED HAMSTRING RELEASE

Get the student in their starting position. The student should sit on the floor, on a carpet or exercise mat. If they are sitting on a mat, they should sit on the end of it so that their legs are on the floor in front of them. If they're on a hardwood floor, they should wear socks. If they're on a carpet, they may find it easier to do the movement without socks.

The student should start by sitting up straight with both legs extended straight out in front of them. If their hamstrings are tight and this position is uncomfortable, the student can put a small pillow or towel under one knee while they work with the other leg.

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 exercise. Instruct your student to bend their right knee and slide their right foot toward them. They should flex their right foot, interlace their fingers under the

bottom of their foot, and rest their foot in their hand.

Instruct your student to very slowly and gently let their right heel slide forward, gently pushing their foot into their hand. They should only slide their foot forward about 6-12 inches this first time. They can let their upper body relax forward as they slide their foot forward. Then they should start slowly coming back up, slowly dragging their right heel on the floor toward them and sitting up straighter.

Talk your student through this process several more times – as many times as they want to do it. They can slide their foot forward a little farther each time, as long as they don't feel a stretch in their hamstrings. Their back muscles will gently contract and release with each repetition as well, as they sit up straight and then relax forward.

When they've done the movement as much as they want to, tell your student to let go of their right foot and extend their right leg. Then talk them through the sequence with their left leg.

Notes:

If extending their legs out straight in front of them is uncomfortable for your student, put a small pillow or rolled up towel under the knee of their non-working leg.

It is very important that the student be able to smoothly and easily slide their heel on the floor, so that they can relax and do the movement correctly. They should not have to lift their heel up in order to move it. They should find the combination of floor surface and socks/no socks that works best.

Please be careful if you are teaching this movement to people with significant lumbar disc or vertebral issues, painful sciatica, or sacroiliac joint pain. They can try to do the movement gently, but there is no benefit to doing this movement if it is not comfortable. Other exercises release the hamstrings and lower back in a safer way for people with these issues.

Common mistakes:

The most common mistake is practicing the exercise with an end goal of straightening the leg, and stretching the hamstrings in the process. Remind your student that there is no end goal; they will probably not straighten their leg completely unless they are very flexible, and they will get more out of the movement if they just focus on moving slowly and gently through their comfortable range of motion.

The following is an example of how I teach the Seated Hamstring Release:

Sit down on your carpet or exercise mat. If you're sitting on a mat, move down to the end of it so that your legs are on the floor in front of you. If you're on a hardwood floor, you'll definitely want to put on socks for this movement. If you're on a carpet, you may find this easier to do without socks.

Start by sitting up straight with both legs extended straight out in front of you. If your hamstrings are tight and this is uncomfortable, you can grab a small pillow or towel to put under one knee while you work with the other leg. You can start by putting the pillow or towel under your left knee.

Bend your right knee and slide your right foot toward you. Flex your right foot, leaving your heel on the floor, and bring your hands underneath your right foot. Interlace your fingers and let your foot rest in your hand.

Very slowly and gently, let your heel start sliding forward on the floor, slowly extending your leg and gently pushing your foot into your hand. Let your upper body relax forward as you do this. Don't go very far this first time – maybe just 6-12 inches. Your leg will still be bent quite a bit. Then start slowly going the other way, dragging your right heel on the floor so that it comes closer to you, and sitting up straighter as you do this.

When you've come back up as far as you want to, start slowly sliding your heel forward again, letting your heel be heavy into the floor, and letting your back, neck, and head relax over your right leg as you slide it down. Maybe your heel will go just a little farther this time. Remember that this is not a stretch, just a slow, gentle contraction and release of the hamstrings.

When you're ready, start slowly coming back up again, dragging your heel on the floor and straightening your back. Then you can slowly slide your heel forward again, letting it go farther if it feels comfortable.

Keep doing this a few more times, allowing your heel to slide a little farther each time, but only if it feels comfortable. There is no end goal here – please don't focus on trying to get your right leg straight, because it probably won't get straight unless you're very flexible. Just focus on moving slowly, letting your heel be heavy into the floor, and allowing your back and hamstrings to gently relax each time you slide your foot forward.

When you're done, take your hands out from under your foot and let your right leg extend. If you have a pillow or towel under your left knee, bring it under your right knee.

(Teach the exercise with the left leg.)