



Standing Hamstring Release

The Standing Hamstring Release allows you to release and gain control of your hamstrings, gluteals, and lower back muscles. The exercise is practiced by standing up, bending forward by hinging at the hips, and very slowly releasing the hamstrings, lower back, and gluteals to bend forward farther. This exercise helps to relieve lower back pain, hyperlordosis, sciatica, tight hamstrings, knee pain, plantar fasciitis, and Achilles tendinitis.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTION

Starting Position: Stand normally, with your arms hanging by your sides and your feet pointing straight ahead. Your feet should be a comfortable hip width distance apart, with about the width of your fist in between your feet.

Movement: Keep your legs straight and your back straight, and very slowly start bending forward. Keep slowly bending forward, hinging at your hips and keeping your back straight and your legs straight. If you feel that you need to protect your knees, you can very gently bend your knees. When you start to feel a very gentle stretch in your hamstrings, along the back of your thighs, stop.

Now very slowly and gently start coming back up. You'll feel a gentle contraction in your hamstrings, gluteal muscles, and lower back. Lift up just enough that you can feel all these areas contracting gently, then start very slowly lowering down again. You should feel that you are very slowly releasing your hamstrings, gluteal muscles, and lower back as you lower down.

When you've released as far as you can with control, and you feel like you're reaching the end of your comfortable range of motion *without stretching*, stop. You can repeat this process as many times as you want: slowly lifting up, feeling the gentle contraction, and then releasing with control as slowly as you possibly can. You may find that you can release a little farther down each time. But, do not force it and do not stretch.

When you've done this as much as you want to, and released as far down as you can comfortably without stretching, gently bend your knees, rest your hands on your thighs for support, and slowly and gently come to standing.

ANATOMY OF THE STANDING HAMSTRING RELEASE

The Standing Hamstring Release releases the following muscles:

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

CONDITIONS HELPED BY THE STANDING HAMSTRING RELEASE

The Standing Hamstring Release helps to alleviate the following conditions:

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

HOW TO TEACH THE STANDING HAMSTRING RELEASE

Get the student in their starting position. Instruct the student to stand up normally, letting their arms hang by their sides and their feet point straight ahead. Their feet should be a comfortable hip width distance apart, with about the width of their fist in between their feet.

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 forward, hinging at their hips, and keeping their back straight. They should keep their legs straight unless it is painful or uncomfortable, in which case they can gently bend their knees. Tell them to bend forward until they feel a *very* gentle stretch in their hamstrings; this is their starting point.

Instruct your student to start slowly and gently coming back up. They should feel a gentle contraction in their hamstrings, lower back, and gluteals. When they've felt that contraction, then they can very slowly start releasing down. Tell your student to resist gravity as they lower down; to lower down with as much control as possible.

The student can repeat this process as many times as they wish: slowly coming up and feeling their hamstrings, lower back, and gluteals contracting, and then very slowly lowering down and releasing. At no point should they feel a stretch, so remind them several times that they should not feel a stretch in their hamstrings.

When the student has released as far down as they can comfortably, they can put their hands on their thighs for support, and slowly and gently come to standing.

Notes:

You should only teach this to students who have been practicing the exercises for a while and have already released their lower back and hamstrings with previous exercises (Arch & Flatten, Lower Back Release, Hamstring Release). It is important that students be very clear on the difference between a stretch and a pandiculation before doing this exercise.

Common mistakes:

Since this looks like a traditional stretch for the hamstrings, students may assume that they should feel a stretch when bending forward. However, they must stay in their comfortable range of motion in order to avoid activating the stretch reflex. Remind your student that they are pandiculating their hamstrings in the same gentle way as they pandiculate their muscles in all of the exercises.

It is also common to release too quickly in this exercise. Counting can help students slow down; it should take to at least the count of 10 or 12 to do each release (longer is great!).

Continued on next page

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

Stand up normally, letting your arms hang by your sides and your feet point straight ahead. Your feet should be a comfortable hip width distance apart, with about the width of your fist in between your feet. This movement is an exercise to release your hamstrings, and it also works with your gluteal muscles and your lower back. This movement is going to look like a typical hamstring stretch. But you'll be doing this movement very differently than you would do a stretch. You'll be very gently contracting your muscles, and releasing them extremely slowly and gently. It's important in this movement to focus on the process of the movement and not on the end goal.

Keep your legs straight and your back straight, and very slowly start bending forward. Keep slowly bending forward, hinging at your hips and keeping your back straight and your legs straight. If you feel that you need to protect your knees, you can gently bend your knees. When you start to feel a gentle stretch in your hamstrings, along the back of your thighs, stop.

Now, very slowly and gently start coming back up. You'll feel a gentle contraction in your hamstrings, gluteals, and lower back. Lift up just enough that you can feel all these areas contracting gently, then start very, very slowly lowering down again. You should feel that you are very slowly releasing your hamstrings, gluteals, and lower back as you lower down. Resist gravity as you lower down. You should not be feeling a stretch.

When you've released as far as you can with control, and you feel like you're reaching the end of your comfortable range of motion, stop. You can repeat this process as many times as you want, slowly lifting back up, feeling the gentle contraction, and then releasing with control as slowly as you possibly can. You may find that you can release a little farther down each time. But, do not force it. Keep reminding yourself that this is not a stretch.

When you've done this as much as you want to, and released as far down as you can comfortably without stretching, gently bend your knees, rest your hands on your thighs for support, and slowly and gently come to standing.