



Internal and External Hip Rotator Releases

The Internal and External Hip Rotator Releases release tightness in the hips and improve alignment of the pelvis, hips, knees and ankles. The exercises involve lying on the back with the knees bent and feet on the floor, and slowly lowering one or both knees either outward or inward to gently release the hip rotators.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTION: INTERNAL HIP ROTATOR RELEASE

Starting Position: Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart, so that you are using little to no effort to be in this position. You can rest your arms by your sides on the floor. Slide your right foot over to meet your left foot, so that your right foot is in line with your spine.

Movement: Very slowly start lowering your right knee out to the side. When you've lowered about halfway down, start slowly lifting your knee back up a few inches, feeling the gentle contraction of your inner thigh muscles. Then start lowering down again, very slowly and gently releasing that contraction. Lower your knee down farther this time if it's comfortable for you. Keep repeating this pattern, lifting your knee up a few inches and then lowering down, until your knee is released as far out to the side as is comfortable for you. Then slide your foot down on the floor and straighten out your right leg, and relax.

Repeat this movement with the left leg.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTION: EXTERNAL HIP ROTATOR RELEASE

Starting Position: Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart, so that you are using little to no effort to be in this position. Cross your left leg all the way over your right leg. You may wish to spread your arms out to the sides for stability.

Movement: Slowly start lowering your knees down to the left side, allowing your right waist and hip to gently elongate. When you've lowered about halfway down, start slowly lifting your knees back up a few inches, feeling the gentle

contraction of the muscles on the right side of your waist and outside of your right hip. Then slowly and gently release that contraction, letting your knees lower down farther to the left side if it is comfortable for you. Keep repeating this pattern, lifting your knees up a few inches and slowly lowering them down, until your knees are released as far down to the left as is comfortable for you. Then, gently roll your pelvis back up to center, and uncross your legs.

Repeat this movement on the other side, crossing your right leg all the way over your left leg, and lowering your knees down to the right side.

ANATOMY OF THE INTERNAL & EXTERNAL HIP ROTATOR RELEASES

Internal Hip Rotator Release: The muscles that medially (internally) rotate the hip and are released by this movement are:

- Semitendinosus
- Semimembranosus
- Gluteus medius
- Gluteus minimus
- Adductor magnus
- Adductor longus
- Adductor brevis
- Gracilis
- Pectineus
- Tensor fasciae latae

External Hip Rotator Release: The muscles that laterally (externally) rotate the hip and are released by this movement are:

- Biceps femoris
- Gluteus maximus
- Gluteus medius
- Sartorius
- Piriformis
- Quadratus femoris
- Obturator internus
- Obturator externus
- Gemellus superior
- Gemellus inferior
- Psoas major
- Iliacus

CONDITIONS HELPED BY THE INTERNAL & EXTERNAL HIP ROTATOR RELEASES

The Internal and External Hip Rotator Releases help to alleviate the following conditions by allowing the student to release and gain control of the internal and external hip rotators:

Tightness and pain in the hips, knees and ankles
Sciatica and piriformis syndrome
Misalignment of the legs: knock-knees, bowlegs, out-toeing
Pelvic rotation
Bunions

HOW TO TEACH THE INTERNAL HIP ROTATOR RELEASE

Get the student in their starting position. The student should begin by lying on their back with their knees bent and feet on the floor. Their knees and feet should be a comfortable hip width distance apart, and their arms can rest on the floor by their sides. Instruct the student to slide their right foot over to meet their left, so that their feet are touching side-by-side, and their right foot is in line with their spine. Bringing the foot of their working side in line with the center of their body changes the angle of the head of the femur in the hip joint, allowing for greater range of motion in this exercise.

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 Internal Hip Rotator Release. Instruct the student to very slowly start lowering their right knee out to the side. When they have lowered about halfway down as far as they can go, they should start slowly lifting their knee back up a few inches, feeling the gentle contraction of the muscles on the inside of their right hip and thigh. They can rest their right hand on the inside of their hip or thigh to feel the muscles contracting. This is a delicate movement, and the student must move very slowly and consciously in order to feel the muscles working. When the student is ready, they can start slowly lowering their knee down again, very slowly and gently releasing the contraction of the muscles on the inside of their hip and thigh. They can lower their knee down farther this time if it is comfortable for them. The student can then repeat this pattern as many times as they wish: slowly lifting their knee up a few inches, feeling the contraction of the muscles that are working, and then slowly lowering down a little farther, until their knee is released as far out to the side as is comfortable for them. When they are done, the student should slide their right foot down on the floor and straighten out their right leg, and relax. When they are ready,

they can slide their right foot back up to their neutral starting position. Then they can slide their left foot over to meet their right foot, and do the exercise with their left leg.

HOW TO TEACH THE EXTERNAL HIP ROTATOR RELEASE

Get the student in their starting position. The student can begin by lying on their back with their knees bent and feet on the floor. Instruct the student to cross their left leg all the way over their right leg. The student may wish to spread their arms out to the sides for stability.

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 External Hip Rotator Release. Instruct the student to start slowly lowering their knees down to the left side, allowing their right waist and hip to gently elongate. When they have lowered their knees about halfway down as far as they can go, they should start slowly lifting their knees back up a few inches, feeling the gentle contraction of the muscles on the right side of their waist and outside of their right hip. When they are ready, they can start slowly and gently releasing that contraction, letting their knees lower down farther to the left if it is comfortable for them. The student can then repeat this pattern as many times as they wish: slowly lifting their knees up a few inches, feeling the contraction of the muscles that are working, and then slowly lowering down a little farther, until their knees are lowered as far down to the left as is comfortable for them. When they are done, they can gently roll their pelvis back up to center, and uncross their legs. The student can then cross their right leg all the way over their left leg, and repeat this movement with their other side, lowering their knees down to the right side.

Considerations:

In the External Hip Rotator Release, your student may feel pain in the inside of the knee of their working leg as they lower their knees down. If they do feel pain, they should not push through it. They should only do this movement within their comfortable range of motion.

When teaching these movements, keep in mind that the nervous system will best remember the last thing that it learned. So, if your student has very tight external rotators, the most important thing for them to learn is how to release their external rotators. For this student, you would first teach them the Internal Hip Rotator Release, then teach them the External Hip Rotator Release afterward. Instruct them to practice the exercises in this order at home, and explain to them why it is important to do so.

Common mistakes:

The most common mistake made in practicing these exercises is performing them as if they are stretches. Keep reminding your student that they should not be feeling a stretch in their muscles as they lower their knees down to the side in either movement. The movements are very slow, controlled releases of the hip rotators. The student must move slowly enough when lifting up their knees that they can feel the rotators contracting; then, they will be able to consciously release them as they lower their knees back down. When they lower their knees to the point that they feel a stretch, they have gone a little too far.

These are delicate, subtle movements and can be difficult for students to feel at first. Encourage your student to keep moving more slowly and more gently in order to feel the contraction and release of the muscles that are working. Counting as they lower their knees down, and even as they raise them up, can help students to move more slowly and get maximum benefit from the exercises.

The following is an example of how I teach the Internal Hip Rotator Release:

Gently come down to the floor, and lie down on your back. Bend up your knees and put your feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart.

Now, slide your right foot over to meet your left foot, so that your feet are right next to each other, and your right foot is in line with the center of your body. Gently start lowering your right knee out to the side. Don't go as far as you can, just go about two thirds of the way. Stop there, and take your right palm and put it on the front of your right hip where it meets the top of your inner thigh. Now very slowly, gently start lifting your knee back up. Just lift up a couple of inches.

Now, as slowly as you possibly can, start releasing your right knee down again. Let yourself go a little farther than you did before. Then, start lifting your knee back up, just a few inches, very slowly, and see if you can feel the muscles of your right inner thigh working. Then, start slowly lowering down again, as slowly as you possibly can, and let yourself go even farther this time, if it's comfortable.

Repeat this a few more times, each time letting your knee release down farther to the side. But do not force your knee down, and don't let this become a stretch. You're just very slowly releasing your hip rotators and inner thigh muscles.

End this movement with your knee released out to the side. Then slowly slide your foot down on the floor and straighten your leg. Rest here for a moment, feeling the openness of your right hip.

Now we'll do that movement on the left side. Come back into your starting position, so that your knees are pointing toward the ceiling and your feet are a comfortable hip width distance apart.

(Teach the movement with the left leg as the working leg.)

The following is an example of how I teach the External Hip Rotator Release:

Gently come down to the floor, and lie down on your back. Bend up your knees and put your feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart.

Cross your left leg over your right leg. Cross it all the way over, so there's no space between your legs. Your left leg will act as a weight in this movement. Reach your arms out to the sides, and let them relax on the floor.

Slowly start lowering your legs down to the left side. You'll feel the right side of your waist and your right hip start to lengthen. When you've lowered partway down, start slowly lifting your knees back up. Not all the way, just bring them back about halfway. You should be feeling the muscles in your right waist, your right buttocks and right hip working to help you bring your knees up. Then very slowly and gently start releasing these muscles to let your knees lower down to the left side again. You can let them lower down farther this time if it's comfortable for you.

Do this several more times, slowly lifting your knees back up, feeling the contraction of the muscles that are working, and then very slowly and gently releasing these muscles to let your legs lower back down to the left. Remember, this is not a stretch, but a slow, controlled release of the muscles. You might feel the release all the way up to the front of your right shoulder.

When you've repeated this several times, and released as far as you want to, gently let your pelvis roll to the right so that your legs come up to center. Uncross your legs, and now cross your right leg over your left leg.

(Teach the movement with the other side, crossing your right leg all the way over your left leg, and lowering your knees down to the right side.)