

## THE BEST & WORST GLUTE EXERCISES

**Bottom line: the strongest glute programs usually combine deep-stretch loading with hard lockout / shortened-position loading. That is the core idea behind the tier list.**

### 1) What your glutes actually do

**Your glutes are made up of three muscles: gluteus maximus, gluteus medius, and gluteus minimus. Together they help extend the hip, stabilize the pelvis, and control leg position during walking, running, climbing, squatting, and single-leg work.**

**For training purposes, think of them like this: the gluteus maximus is the big power producer for hip extension; the gluteus medius and minimus help with abduction, pelvic stability, and controlling femur position.**

### 2) The principle behind the deck

**The deck's main claim is that the best glute exercises do one of two jobs well: they load the glutes hard when they are lengthened and stretched, or they load the glutes hard when they are shortened and squeezed.**

**That idea lines up reasonably well with current coaching and research reviews: different exercises challenge the glutes in different parts of the range of motion, so a better plan is usually to combine movement patterns instead of betting everything on one lift.**

### 3) What the research says

**Topic: Hip thrusts vs. squats**

**What the evidence suggests:** A 2023 trial found similar glute hypertrophy from hip thrust and squat training, even though hip thrusts produced higher glute EMG. In other words, feeling more glute burn did not automatically mean more growth.

**What that means for members:** Hip thrusts are useful, but they are not magic. Keep them in the plan, but do not assume they must replace squats, lunges, or hinges.

**Topic:** Exercise categories

**What the evidence suggests:** The NSCA review recommends using a mix of horizontal hip-extension work, vertical hip-extension work, and lateral/rotary glute work because each stresses the glutes differently.

**What that means for members:** Your routine should usually include one deep-stretch pattern, one lockout/squeeze pattern, and one abduction/stability pattern.

**Topic:** Hip abduction work

**What the evidence suggests:** Research and review papers show hip abduction work is valuable for glute medius/minimus and pelvic control. Machine hip abduction can bias the target muscles well while reducing tensor fascia latae dominance.

**What that means for members:** The abduction machine is not a gimmick. It is a smart accessory, especially for upper-glute feeling and hip stability.

**Topic:** EMG vs. muscle growth

**What the evidence suggests:** Acute EMG can tell us a muscle is working, but it does not perfectly predict long-term hypertrophy.

**What that means for members:** Do not rank an exercise only by burn, pump, or social-media hype. Track progress over weeks: load, reps, control, and recovery.

**4) Exercise-by-exercise breakdown**

**S-Tier:** Walking lunges

**Why they rank high:** They create large hip flexion, challenge each side independently, train the glute max in a lengthened position, and add a stability demand that many people feel immediately.

**Best for:** Members who want size, athletic carryover, and a brutally effective deep-stretch pattern.

**Coaching cues:** Take a long enough step to load the hip. Keep slight torso lean, push through the full foot, and drive the floor away.

**S-Tier:** Machine abduction

**Why they rank high:** They directly train the glute medius/minimus and can be loaded safely with low skill demand. They also complement the bigger hip-extension lifts.

**Best for:** Members who want more upper-glute work, pelvic control, and a joint-friendly accessory.

**Coaching cues:** Sit tall or lean slightly forward if it helps you feel the glutes. Control the return. Do not bounce reps.

**S-Tier:** 45-degree back extensions

**Why they rank high:** When set up with a glute bias, they combine a useful stretch with a strong squeeze and are often easier on the knees than lunge variations.

**Best for:** Members who like posterior-chain work but do not want every hard glute day to come from barbell lifts.

**Coaching cues:** Round the upper back slightly, keep chin tucked, push hips into the pad, and think of moving through the hips instead of cranking the low back.

**A-Tier:** Romanian deadlifts

**Why they rank high:** RDLs deliver major stretch tension and overload potential. They are one of the best heavy hinge patterns for glute max and hamstrings.

**Best for:** Members who can maintain hinge mechanics and want strength plus size.

**Coaching cues:** Soft knees, hips back, bar close, spine braced, and stop the descent where you still own the position.

## **B-Tier: Barbell hip thrusts**

**Why they rank where they do:** Hip thrusts are excellent for shortened-position tension and lockout strength. The fair criticism is not that they are bad; it is that they do not cover the whole job by themselves.

**Best for:** Members who want a glute-focused lift with high loading potential and less soreness than deep-stretch work.

**Coaching cues:** Ribs down, chin tucked, shins vertical near the top, pause hard at lockout, and avoid turning it into a low-back arch.

**Lower-tier examples:** donkey kicks, fire hydrants, kettlebell swings

**Why they rank lower for hypertrophy:** These movements can have a place for warm-ups, motor control, conditioning, or rehab, but they are harder to progressively overload for serious muscle growth in many members.

**Best for:** Activation, low-load work, home training, or finishing circuits.

**Coaching cues:** Use them on purpose. Do not mistake easy-to-feel exercises for the highest-return growth exercises.

## **5) How to turn this into a real plan**

- **A simple rule works well:** pick 1 big deep-stretch lift, 1 squeeze-dominant lift, and 1 abduction accessory per session.
- **Train glutes 2–3 times per week** with at least 48 hours between hard sessions when recovery is limited.
- **For the main lifts, live mostly in the 6–12 rep range.** For machine abductions and other accessories, 10–20 reps often works very well.
- **Leave 0–3 reps in reserve on most hard sets.** You do not need to fail every set to grow.
- **Progress by adding a rep, slowing the eccentric, or adding small amounts of load while keeping form clean.**

## **6) Sample two-day Club 24 glute plan**

## **Day 1**

**Walking lunges — 3–4 x 8–12 each leg**

**Main deep-stretch move**

**Barbell hip thrusts — 3–4 x 6–10**

**Pause hard at the top**

**Machine abductions — 2–4 x 12–20**

**Control both directions**

## **Day 2**

**Romanian deadlifts — 3–4 x 6–10**

**Heavy hinge focus**

**45-degree back extensions — 3–4 x 10–15**

**Glute-biased setup**

**Machine abductions or band work — 2–3 x 15–20**

**Finish with constant tension**

## **7) Common mistakes**

- **Copying social-media rankings without matching them to your body, skill level, and recovery.**
- **Using only hip thrusts or only abduction work and calling it a complete glute program.**
- **Turning every rep into momentum instead of controlled muscle work.**
- **Ignoring nutrition. Protein and total calorie intake still matter if your goal is muscle growth.**
- **Pushing through hip, knee, or low-back pain instead of modifying the pattern.**

## REFERENCES:

- **Frontiers in Physiology (2023): *Hip thrust and back squat training elicit similar gluteus muscle hypertrophy and transfer similarly to the deadlift.***
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- **International Journal of Sports Physical Therapy (2020): *Systematic review and meta-analysis of exercises generating high gluteus medius/minimus activity.***
- **Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies (2022): *Hip abduction machine compared with free weights for targeting gluteus medius while limiting tensor fascia latae involvement.***
- **Cleveland Clinic anatomy overview of the gluteal muscles.**