

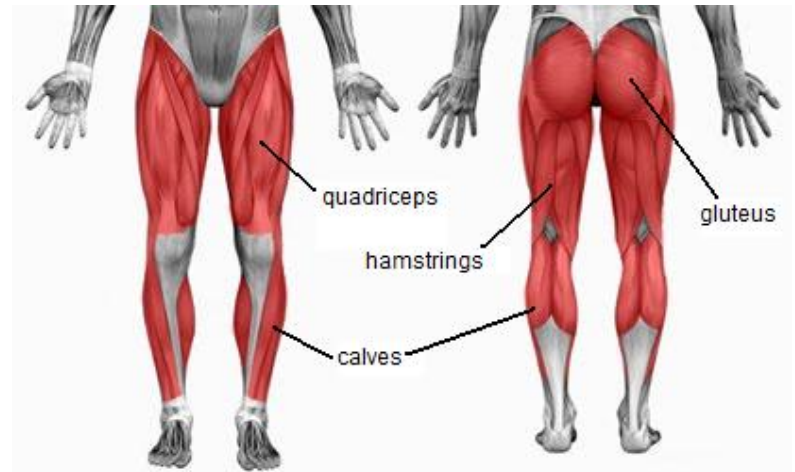


## Muscle Focus: Legs

*Luke Barden, January 2014*

The legs are made up of four main muscle groups: the quadriceps (quads), gluteus (glutes), hamstrings and calves.

These can be further broken down, with the breakdown I will explain the function of each group of muscles and how to work them.



### The Quads

Made up of four muscles (Rectus Femoris, Vastus Lateralis, Vastus Medialis, Vastus Intermedius) the quads are primarily an extensor of the knee joint, but also aid in flexion of the hip.

To work the quads directly, do leg extensions. Very effective exercises include squats, lunges and leg press.

### The Glutes

Made up of four muscles (Gluteus Maximus, Gluteus Medius, Gluteus Minimus, Tensor Fasciae Late) the glutes primarily extend and laterally rotate the hip, and also extend the trunk.

To work the glutes use compound movements, such as lunges, squats, deadlifts and good mornings.

### The Hamstrings

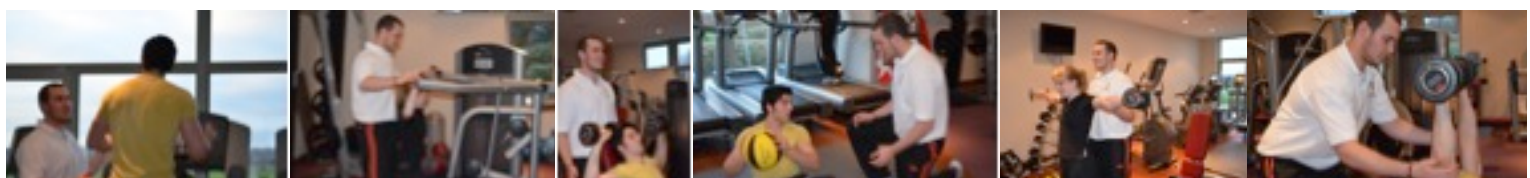
Made up of three muscles (Semitendinosus, Semimembranosus, Biceps Femoris) the hamstrings are primarily flexors of the knee, but also aid in extension of the hip.

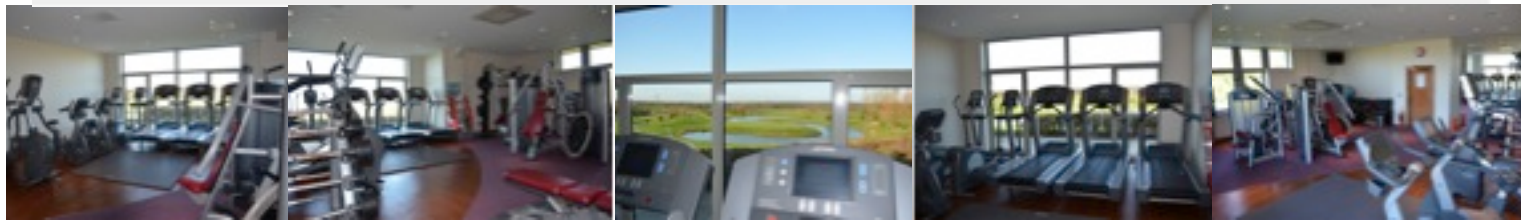
To train the hamstrings directly, do leg curls. Romanian deadlifts are also very effective as well as squats.

### The Calves

Made up of two main muscles (Gastrocnemius, Soleus) the calves are primarily an extensor of the ankle joint.

To work the calves, push the toes down away from the body through a full range of motion at the ankle, this can be standing, seated or donkey calf raises.





## Training the legs

I have mentioned exercises that train each muscle above, and now will explain a bit about training the legs.

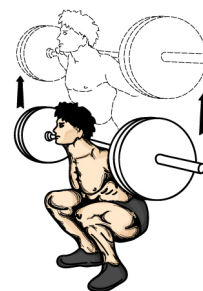
Compound movements work best with developing the leg muscles. They allow you to work each muscle over two joints, i.e. the hip and the knee with a squat for the quads. They also allow you to get stronger quickly, therefore improving the connections between all the muscles and their ability to work together. If you are trying to build size on the legs, it will take a lot of hard work, as they are normally slow to grow. Always do compound movements first in the workout, then finish with the workout with the isolation exercises mentioned above that work each muscle directly (leg extensions, leg curls, calf raises).

Some quick pointers on two key leg exercises:

## Squats

Squats are one of the key exercises to learn, but correct technique is essential, with vital points being:

- Keep the back as straight as possible throughout the movement, do not arch!
- Keep the whole foot flat to the floor, do not let the heels rise.
- Keep the head upright, do not end up facing the floor.

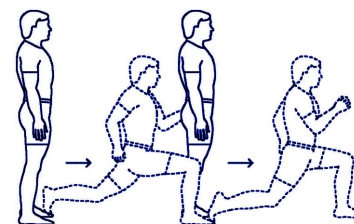


Go down until your thighs are parallel (or lower if your flexibility allows it) and then drive through your heels into the ground, keeping your head up as you push yourself back to standing.

## Lunges

Much less weight will be used with lunges, and balance will be more of a challenge.

- Ensure you always keep your body upright
- The knee of the rear leg needs to go as low to the floor without touching it as you can.
- Try and maintain a shoulder width with your feet, which will aid with balance.



Lunges can either be done standing (return to the start position) or walking (keep moving forwards). You can add weight to lunges by holding dumbbells, or having a barbell on your shoulders as you would a squat, but always ensure you stay upright.

There are many variables with both exercises, but those are the basic two techniques. Once you have grasped them, you can try others, but I would advise keeping these as the regular core of your leg workouts.

