



On the Mat

Relieving tight hips: Yoga meets the Franklin Method

by Christa Rypins

Tight hips are a misery. They can cause pain in the knees and back, make walking difficult, sex uncomfortable, and yoga scary—and they can leave you feeling as if there’s something really wrong with your body. Tightness in the hips affects everything else in the body, and it’s hard to feel good about life when much of your body is in some degree of pain. For yoga teachers, this experience can be even worse, because we’re “supposed” to have answers and solutions for this. Shame can compound the pain—creating a veritable bouquet of discomfort!

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Sure, we know poses for stretching and opening hip muscles, but sometimes tightness prevails. What to do? This article offers a new set of tools for working with the hips, in which we focus on softening connective tissue rather than stretching muscles. From that place of softness and opening, new possibilities arise.

You’ll need a 3- to 4-inch mini-ball; I like [Balanced Body](#), or something soft that you can make into a ball, such as a hand towel or washcloth. You could use tennis balls, but they’re very hard, and we’re going for release, not torture. If you

feel yourself tightening up against the tension as you’re releasing, that’s

a signal to find something softer.

I’ve created [a video](#) that demonstrates what you’re about to read—follow along while reading these instructions. To get the full magic, you’ll need a partner, but you can also practice these exercises on your own.

1. Lie on your tummy on a firm surface (beds are usually too soft) and place the mini-ball/prop so that it presses into your iliacus. Find the diagonal line between the two bones that you can feel on the front of your pelvis: the pubis and the Anterior Superior Iliac Spine (ASIS for short, or your “hipbone” in the general lexicon). Place the ball so that it presses into tissue, not bone.
2. Turn your feet and legs inward to help your buttock muscles relax. Rest your forehead on your hands. Breathe. Soften your tongue and jaw and wait for the surface abdominal muscles to soften so that the ball can find its way to the iliacus, which fans along the iliac bone (hence the name). If you want more pressure, lift onto your elbows, a la Sphinx pose, and, again, breathe, relax, and feel for the softening. After the muscle has let go, turn your foot out, adding a bit more stretch to the compression. Hang out there, breathing and softening.
3. Once you feel the next release, roll the heel in and out, rolling the pelvis over the ball, accessing more areas of the muscle. Finally, bring the knee a bit out to the side and circle the lower leg, creating even more rolling of the pelvis, halfway over the ball. Take the ball away and feel the difference in the two sides—the breath, the hip and knee flexibility, the feelings on both sides in Child’s pose, etc.
4. You can now repeat the series on your second hip, or move into the partner work on the same side, adding manual massage of the muscles on the outside of the pelvis to the iliacus mini-ball massage.
5. With the mini-ball pressing into the iliacus, you can massage the external muscles by having your partner gently rock the pelvis over the ball. Have your partner gently press into the sides and back of the pelvis, creating a rocking motion while pressing into the muscles. (The video illustrates how this works.) If you don’t have a partner handy, you can press and rock your own hip.

The muscles we’re softening include the hip rotators, which consist of six muscles from the middle of the buttocks down; the gluteals, the muscles in the side of the hip; and the gluteus maximus, consisting of all the other buttock muscles. But you don’t have to understand the anatomical subtleties to experience the benefits of these exercises. Apply the series to the second side and then do your practice, or whatever’s next for you, feeling the difference in your hips and your whole being! ■

[Christa Rypins](#) has a unique gift for helping others reduce chronic pain. She offers private lessons via Skype, and empowers yoga teachers with tools to help their students become pain-free, strong, and limitless. Christa teaches two Kripalu programs this spring: [The Pleasures of Pelvic Power: Yoga Meets the Franklin Method](#), May 21–24, and [Yoga for a Better Back: Five Secrets for a Feel-Good Body Using the Franklin Method](#), May 24–27. www.intelligentbody.net

