

## The Bottom line: never too late to rebuild muscle.

It is never too late to rebuild your gluteal muscles, according to Stuart Baptist, director of Sydney Men's Health Physiotherapy.

He says there is no muscle in the body that can't be developed "because the beautiful thing about us humans is that we are plastic objects and if you apply enough stress, accurately enough, for a long enough period, the body's natural process is to adapt and change".

With targeted exercises, the potential to recover and optimise strength in the gluteals is always there.

He explains the gluteals are used in weight-bearing and when you stand on one leg, the gluteal on that side works to stabilise your pelvis.

If you stand on your right leg and your left hip drops, it means you have a weak right gluteal. If you walk and your pelvis stays relatively level, your gluteals are functioning well as stabilisers.

When you walk behind someone who has a shimmy in their step, observe closely and you'll see their bottom keeps dropping on the non-weight-bearing side. This is often a sign that their gluteals are weak.

Baptist says it is best to test for gluteal weakness in a dynamic environment. He usually puts patients on a treadmill and videos them as they run.

"We often test people when they are static and wonder why they break down when they are moving – it's because we have not assessed them effectively."

### **MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE**

While the gluteals have two functions, as stabilisers and prime movers, he says looks can be deceiving.

The deep layers of the buttock muscles – the gluteus minimus and gluteus medius – provide stability and it is quite possible for these to be weak while the proud prime mover that drives forward motion, the gluteus maximus, appears rounded and strong.

"Sometimes I see an athlete with big round buttocks but when I stand him on one leg, the other hip drops because he has a deeper stability problem – the deeper layer is weak."

"Just as some people have big bums and are not stable, so some can have tiny bums that are stable but they don't look good because they are generally flat. They are flat because they are deconditioned from being sat on all day."

After a long day at their desk, many executives go for a run and while they derive overall value from this, their gluteals are often not conditioned enough to benefit specifically.

In those who choose to cycle, the gluteal benefit is even smaller.

"With cycling the glutes tend to get weaker than they would with running because the hip is in a much more flexed position. Running has more hip extension and so engages the gluteals more."

But, you can improve on this. As Baptist says, "you can teach an old dog new tricks."

**Jill Margo**

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