

Happy, Healthy Hamstrings

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Your hamstrings: best friend, most stubborn opponent.

The hamstrings are a group of 3 muscles that start at your sitting bones and end at bony protuberances below the knee on both sides. Because they cross both the hip and the knee joint, their function acts upon both joints to bend the knee, extend the hip, and medially and laterally rotate the lower leg when the knee is bent.

All three originate at the sitting bones, those bumpy bones under your tush and run down the length of the back of the leg, splitting off just above the knee - 2 to the inner knee (Semimembranosus and Semitendinosus) and one (Biceps femoris) splits again into two and attaches at the outer knee.

If you've heard of them, then good chance is that you've felt them as well. Most injury to the hamstrings occurs through over-stretching or over-training. Massage helps to circulate fresh blood in the area, work out any adhesions, or places where the muscle fibers may be stuck together and pulling on the attachment points causing aches and pains, and soften their tenacious hold.

In addition, here are a few tips you can do for yourself to help already injured hamstrings heal and prevent further injury.

- Stretching with ECCENTRIC contraction - that means that the muscle is contracting and lengthening at the same time.
- Start in a sitting position with your legs straight out in front of you – your hamstrings are extended in this position.
- Locate your sitting bones by pulling the flesh of your buttocks out of the way.
- Press down into the sitting bones, lift your low belly and straighten your spine up to the sky. You may be able to feel your hamstrings stretching already.
- Activate the muscle group by pushing your heels into the floor strongly as you continue to lengthen upward.
- On an inhale stretch the spine long – think up, not forward. On the exhale press the heels down, keeping the inner edges of the feet sealed together
- For stubborn hamstrings, do the same thing as above, but add a strap or belt around your feet to hold on to. If you notice that you are leaning back into what I fondly call the “giddyup” position, re-engage the muscles by pressing the heels down, bend the elbows and lift out of the low spine so the shoulders are directly over the hips.

If something feels wrong or funny, listen to that wisdom and don't push it. You won't heal more quickly by continuing to agitate an already irritated muscle. Little by little the giant gap between your legs and your chest will close. It might take years, but transformation is inevitable.

