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Strong Hips

Five exercises for your hips — real exercises, not stretches — with three levels each, so you can start exactly where you are today. All you need is a chair, a step, and something sturdy to hold on to.

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The plan

The week	2–3 times a week, with **at least one full day off in between.**
Sets	2–3 sets of every exercise.
Reps	Listed with each exercise — 8–12 or 10–15.
Levels	**Start with Level 1.** Move up only when you can do it with good form and **no pain.**
Order	Do them in the order they're listed — most demanding first. That's how I set up every strength workout.
How long	**8 weeks,** then take the 10-second test again.

Two ways to use it

As a lower-body workout: all five exercises, top to bottom.
Added to what you already do: pick the ones you like and slot them in.

Both sides, always

On any one-sided exercise, **start with your weaker side.** Then give the stronger side the same weight and the same reps — even if it could do more. That's how the weaker side catches up, and uneven strength is a big cause of pain and injury.

What you need

- A sturdy chair, couch, bench, or box
- A stair or step stool
- A counter, rail, or piece of furniture to hold on to
- Optional: dumbbells, and a small loop resistance band

No dumbbells yet? Every exercise starts with bodyweight. Add weight when you can.

Why strengthen instead of stretch?

Your hip is a ball-and-socket joint, and what holds it steady is **muscle**. The big ones are the glutes across the back and sides of your hip, your hamstrings, and your core. They keep your pelvis level and your leg tracking straight every time you walk, stand, or climb stairs.

When they're weak, other muscles cover for them — muscles that were never meant to do that job. Stretching is useful — it can help you move more comfortably. But **strengthening the muscles around your hip is what makes the real, lasting difference** — for your pain, your balance, and how well you move.

Before you start

See a doctor immediately if:

- Your hip pain **wakes you up at night** and doesn't go away
- It started **after a fall**
- You have hip or groin pain **with a fever**
- Your hip is **red, swollen, or warm**

If you've had hip surgery or are being considered for it, clear this with your surgeon first. If your doctor has told you to avoid certain lower-body exercises, that overrides anything here.

The exercises

5 exercises · 2–3 sets each

1 Squat

THIGHS · GLUTES · CORE

Level 1 Chair squat from a high seat

Level 2 Chair squat from a lower seat

Level 3 Squat with no chair — hold on to something at first

Form: Sit down slowly — don't plop — and stand back up **without using your hands.** Only go as low as you can without pain; if you can't go lower, add reps instead.

Reps and sets: 8–12 reps, 2–3 sets

Level up: a dumbbell in each hand or one against your chest. A loop band just above your knees adds work for the sides of your hips — at any level.

2 Step-Up

THIGHS · GLUTES · CORE

Level 1 Pre-step-up — shift your weight onto the step until your back heel lifts, then shift back

Level 2 Full step-up

Level 3 Step-up holding a dumbbell on the same side as the stepping leg

Form: Whole foot on the step. Push through that heel and stand all the way up, then lower slowly. Don't push off the back foot or push too hard on the rail — that takes the work away from your front leg.

Reps and sets: 8–12 reps, 2–3 sets (one leg, then switch)

Hip or knee pain: add reps and weight before you add step height.

3 Hip Hinge

GLUTES · HAMSTRINGS · BACK · CORE

Level 1 Bodyweight, hands resting on your thighs

Level 2 A dumbbell in each hand (a Romanian deadlift)

Level 3 B-stance — back foot on its toes like a kickstand, weight on the front leg

Form: Knees soft. Push your hips back like you're closing a car door with your butt. **Back flat, not rounded,** core braced. Stop when you feel the stretch in the back of your thighs, then stand up and squeeze your butt. Keep dumbbells close to your legs.

Reps and sets: 8–12 reps, 2–3 sets (each leg for Level 3)

Spine or disc injury: skip this one unless your doctor says it's OK. **First time?** Film yourself on your phone rather than watching a mirror.

4 Glute Bridge

GLUTES · HAMSTRINGS · CORE

Level 1 Bodyweight bridge

Level 2 A dumbbell across your lap, on a folded towel

Level 3 Dumbbell plus a loop band above your knees

Form: On your back, knees bent, heels close enough to brush with your fingertips. Push through your heels, lift your hips, squeeze hard, and hold a couple of seconds. **Don't arch your back** to get higher — the lift comes from your hips. With the band, keep pushing your knees out the whole time.

Reps and sets: 10–15 reps, 2–3 sets

Getting down to the floor is hard? Do it on a firm bed or couch.

5 Hip Abduction

SIDES OF THE HIPS & GLUTES

Level 1 Standing, holding the counter or back of the couch

Level 2 Side-lying leg raise

Level 3 Side-lying, with a 2–3 second hold at the top

Form: Stand tall (or lie with your top leg straight and in line with your body). Lift the leg straight out to the side — only as high as is comfortable — and lower slowly. **Height isn't the goal;** don't lean your body over to get more.

Reps and sets: 10–15 reps, 2–3 sets (one side, then switch)

Level up: a loop band above your knees. Can't lie on your side? Stay standing and add reps or a thicker band.

Squat · Step-up · Hip Hinge · Glute Bridge · Hip Abduction

The 10-second test

1. **Barefoot,** close enough to a counter or the back of the couch to grab it if you need to.
2. Stand on one leg and rest the **top of your other foot against the back of your standing calf.**
3. Arms at your sides, back straight, chest up, eyes forward.
4. Hold for **10 seconds.** You get 3 tries. Then do the other leg.

84%
higher risk of dying over 7 years in people 51–75 who couldn't hold it

> 1 in 3
people in their late 60s can't do it

Couldn't do it? That's your **starting point, not a verdict.** Do these exercises 2–3 times a week for 8 weeks and test again.

Write your results in the "Before" box on your calendar — the last page of this guide.

Working around knee pain too? My free lower-body guide walks you through knee-friendly swaps — **rachelfelber.com/knees**

Want to build your own workouts?

This guide gives you five exercises. **Your First Strength Program** teaches you how to build your own workouts — around your body, your history, your equipment, and your schedule — so you never have to search YouTube for the perfect workout again.

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My 8-Week Strong Hips Calendar

Print this page and put it where you'll see it every day — the fridge, the bathroom mirror, next to the coffee maker. Somewhere your family and visitors will see it too. **Plan ahead:** before each week starts, circle the 2–3 days you'll do your workouts. Choosing your days ahead of time makes it **much more likely you'll actually get them done.** Every time you finish a workout, give that day a **big check mark.**

BEFORE 10-second test

DATE _____ LEFT LEG: SECONDS _____ RIGHT LEG: SECONDS _____

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							
Week 5							
Week 6							
Week 7							
Week 8							

AFTER 10-second test

DATE _____ LEFT LEG: SECONDS _____ RIGHT LEG: SECONDS _____