



This Reformer routine, which tones the thighs and lifts the butt, will have you reaching for your jeggings every chance you get!

Workout by Kristine Bjornstad

We've all been there: Lying on a bed, sucking in our stomach, trying to zip our tightest pair of jeans. Stop the torture, says Pilates teacher Kristine Bjornstad, who created this Reformer workout, which should be done twice a week, to whip your lower body into denim-ready shape.

The secret behind this routine is the sequencing of movements. "I recently attended an exercise coaching program through the CHEK Institute, where we discussed the importance of a properly functioning extensor chain to bring people back into balance," says Bjornstad. "The correct sequencing of hip extension movements requires the glutes to fire first because they are responsible for controlling most of the movement. The hamstrings, erector spine and quadrates lumborum (back muscles) will then fire synergistically."

As you're doing the exercises, pay close attention to what muscles engage at the start, the middle and the end of the movement. "Placing your hands on your glutes and hamstrings is a great way to bring more awareness to these muscles and to ensure the proper firing pattern," says Bjornstad.

The more efficiently you do the movements, the better your muscles will engage—and start to develop and look. You'll be ready to rock your skinnies in no time!

Standing Lunge on the Ball



PROPS: Swiss ball

PURPOSE: strengthens the legs, glutes and the lateral stabilizing muscles of the hips and legs; improves balance

SETUP: Stand with your right side near the Reformer, feet in line with the gear bar, and the ball on the floor behind you. Place your right fingertips on the footbar and your left hand on your hip for balance, and place your left foot on the top of the ball. Your left knee is directly under your left hip and your right leg is strongly rooted into the floor.

1. Exhale as you extend your left leg behind you, pressing the ball away. Lower your body into a lunge on your right leg, initiating the movement from your hamstrings and glutes. Your torso will bend forward slightly, but make sure to keep your spine as close to neutral as possible.

2. Inhale as you firmly press the heel of your right foot into the floor to bring you back up to the starting position, being careful not to hyperextend your right knee. Do 15 repetitions, then repeat on your other leg.

TIPS: If you feel burning in your left leg, make sure the majority of your body weight is grounded in the right leg.

ADVANCED: Place your hands on your hips or straight out to your sides.



Grasshopper



SETTING: 2–3 springs

PROPS: Swiss ball

PURPOSE: works the lower body in extension while stabilizing the upper body

SETUP: Place the ball on the Reformer against

the shoulder blocks. Facing the footbar, stand on the left side of the Reformer. Place your left hand on the ball and your right hand on the headrest. Step your left foot on top of the frame closest to you, and then place your right foot on top of the frame farthest from you. Lift your hands and place them on the ball or on the carriage in front of the ball. Lower your belly on top of the ball and let your legs hang over the ball, feet in Pilates stance (heels together, toes apart). Place your palms firmly on the outside frame of the Reformer in line with the gear bar, elbows bent. Stabilize your upper body by anchoring your shoulder blades down your back and keeping your neck in line with your spine.

1. Inhale as you engage your seat to lift your legs high to the sky, feet in Pilates stance.

2. At the top of the lift, kick your heels one time toward your seat, keeping your heels glued together as your knees split apart.

3. Lift your legs back toward the sky. Exhale and, with straight legs, beat your heels repeatedly as you lower your legs with control over the ball. Do 3-5 repetitions.

TIP: Work deeply into the inner thighs on the beats.

MODIFICATION: Decrease your range of motion if you have low-back pain.



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Knee Stretch



SETTING: 1 heavy spring

PROPS: none

PURPOSE: strengthens the legs and glutes; challenges the powerhouse

SETUP: Facing the footbar, kneel on the Reformer. Place your hands shoulder-width apart on the footbar, and press your feet up against the shoulder blocks. Draw your navel in and up and, keeping your

spine neutral, lift your knees 2 inches off of the carriage. Your body weight will shift over your wrists.

1. Inhale as you lift your right foot off the carriage and bring your right knee in deeply toward the footbar as you

simultaneously extend the left leg, strongly pushing the carriage away in opposition.

2. Exhale and, with control, return the carriage by bending your left knee as your right leg simultaneously straightens. Your bent knee should only be 2 inches off the carriage. Maintain a neutral spine and keep your hips squared. Do 6–8 repetitions, then repeat on your other side.

TIPS: Maintain a neutral spine by shooting the tailbone out (stick your butt out slightly), and keep your navel drawn in during the entire movement.

Standing Lunge with Leg Slide



SETTING: 1 medium spring

PROPS: non-slip pads (not shown)

PURPOSE: strengthens the hamstrings, glutes and quadriceps; improves balance and coordination in the legs and hips

SETUP: Place one non-slip pad on the front frame and one on the middle of the Reformer. Facing the shoulder blocks, stand on the

Reformer, placing the ball of your left foot on the front frame. Keep your body weight grounded in your left foot as you place your right foot in the middle of the carriage. Keep your hips square and your arms on your hips (or straight out to your sides).

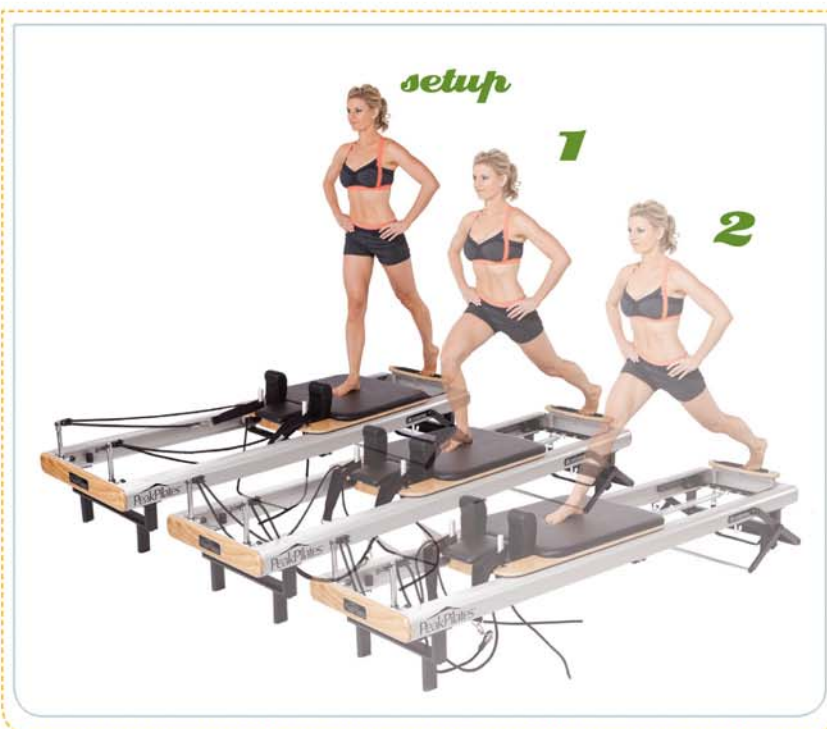
1. Exhale as you lower your body down into a lunge, pressing the carriage forward.

2. Keep your hips square as you press your right leg forward with control into knee extension, straightening your right leg.

3. Inhale as you draw the carriage back in so your right foot is under your knee, and then return to the starting position, keeping your torso long and gazing toward the back end of the Reformer. Do 10–12 repetitions and then repeat on the other leg.

MODIFICATION: Omit the leg slide.

ADVANCED: Add an upper-body twist to the right as your right leg fully extends.





3-Point Ball Work on Long Box



SETTING: 2 springs
PROPS: Long Box, small ball
PURPOSE: strengthens and tones the hamstrings, glutes and abductors while maintaining a neutral spine.
SETUP: Facing the footbar, get on all fours on the Long Box. Place your hands at the front edge of the Box, shoulders stacked over them. Keep your knees toward the back of the Box with your hips stacked directly over them. Your spine is neutral, the powerhouse is engaged, and the back of the neck is long. Lift your left knee slightly and place the ball behind your knee, gently squeezing it with your hamstrings.

1. Inhale and lift your left thigh up until it is about parallel to the floor, keeping your hips level. You can lift the thigh higher as long as you can maintain neutral spine.
2. Exhale and, with control, lower your thigh back toward the Box. Do 15 repetitions.

3. Inhale and, initiating the movement from your abductors, raise your left thigh out to your side. Only lift as high as you can keep your hips squared.
4. Exhale as you lower your thigh back down with control. Do 15 repetitions.
5. Repeat steps 1–4 with your other leg.

TIPS: Keep your body weight evenly distributed between your hands and knee. Create a feeling of lifting up through the wrists to minimize the pressure on them.

MODIFICATION: Decrease your range of motion if you have low-back pain.

ADVANCED: Use a light hand weight instead of the ball.

Gear Guide



Gymnic Classic Plus Series stability ball (\$27.40; www.optp.com)



Peak Pilates® Fit™ Reformer (\$2,295; www.peakpilates.com)



Bender Ball (\$9.99 for ball and instructional DVD; www.benderball.com)

Speed Skater with Squat



SETTING: 1 medium spring, negative gear

PROPS: non-slip pads (not shown), small ball

PURPOSE: strengthens the extensor chain (back) muscles and hip muscles; tones the inner thighs

SETUP: For safety, place a non-slip pad on the front frame of the Reformer, keeping the footbar down, and another one at the very edge of the carriage. Carefully step on the middle of the carriage with both feet, facing sideways on the Reformer. Bending your left knee for stability, place your right foot on the frame, then, grounding your weight into your right foot, place your left foot on the pad on the edge of the carriage. Place the ball high between the inner thighs and cross your arms across your chest. Make sure that your feet are parallel and in line with one another, and stand tall with your navel drawn in and your tailbone reaching long.

1. Exhale as you lower down into a squat. Lower as far as you can while maintaining a neutral spine. Keep light pressure on the ball to engage the adductors, and make sure your knees track over your toes, and your head remains in line with your spine.

2. Inhale and strongly press through the heels of your feet as you engage your hamstrings and glutes to come back to standing. Do 12–15 repetitions.

3. On the last rep, lower back down into a squat, grab the ball and hold it behind your back with both hands.

4. Inhale as you engage the muscles of your left leg and press the carriage away, maintaining a neutral spine and keeping your powerhouse engaged and your right leg still.

5. Exhale as you bend the left leg, returning the carriage with control. Do 15 repetitions.

6. Repeat steps 1–5 with your other leg.

TIP: On steps 3–4, imagine that you are reaching your foot to the back of the Reformer.

setup



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Peak Pilates—certified Kristine Bjornstad has been in the health and fitness industry for a decade. The CHEK Exercise and Holistic lifestyle coach owns and operates Perfect Form Studio, a Pilates and strength training studio in Cornelius, NC. Additionally, the PS veteran—she’s been featured twice—is the creator and star of two Pilates DVDs, and has appeared on FOX News Rising. Kristine’s main focus with her clients? To help them restore balance to their bodies, especially as it relates to their posture.