



Emily Troscianko

Moving and stretching

So, this time is for nothing else except doing some gentle and maybe slightly interesting movements and seeing how they feel: how it feels to not just be sitting, or standing, or walking, like you usually do, but letting your limbs extend themselves and bend themselves in different ways from usual. These moves are some of the ones that I find particularly nice after too long sitting, but they can also be nice first thing after getting up—or at any point when you want to liven up your nervous system and your muscles a bit, and get some blood flowing a bit more enthusiastically. If you need to adapt anything I suggest to what feels possible or good for you right now, please do.

Standing

So let's start simply standing. Or maybe it isn't that simple. Let's try standing in a way that has a good chance of feeling nice. So feet about shoulder width apart, toes just a little turned out, weight through the centre of the feet. To find where centre is, you can try drifting forwards onto the balls of your feet, then drifting back onto the heels, and then coming back to that easy centrepiece in between. And now let your shoulders drop away from your ears, and let your shoulder blades slide flat on your back, and feel the

arching length of your spine, and let your head be light and mobile on top of it. And maybe turn your palms to face a bit more forward, and feel how that encourages your chest to open up a bit. And close your eyes if you like, so you can focus better on what you're feeling.

Windmills

Now extend your arms straight out in front of you, reaching forwards with your fingertips. As you breathe out, bring your chin down to your chest and let your midback arch like an angry cat, as if you were trying to touch the wall behind you with your middle vertebrae. Let all the air out of your lungs, and feel the stretch. And then as you breathe in again, draw your elbows back and press your chest forwards and up, letting your chin rise towards the sky. And repeat, exhaling and letting the back curve out behind you with your fingertips reaching forwards and your chin down to your chest, feeling the expansion in the back of your ribcage and between your vertebrae. And then inhale, elbows drawing back, puffing the chest out, chin up, expanding up to the sky. And once more, exhale... and inhale. And then come back to neutral, with your arms by your sides.



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Give yourself a shake, and now bring your arms straight out to other side. Keep your breathing nice and deep and even, and start to make very small forward circles with your fingertips. And now gradually increase the size of the circles you're drawing in the air, feeling more and more movement happening in the mid back and the upper back and shoulders, until eventually, still with nice straight arms, you're reaching right up to the sky and right down to the floor with each revolution. Do six or seven full span circles like this, noticing any shoulder clicking or any other sensations there may be, gently pressing against any resistance, keeping the elbows straight. And then let the momentum drop away, let your arms come to stillness at your sides. Now raise them to the same position, straight out either side of you, and start the circles, backwards this time. Gradually grow the circles until they're as big as they can be, and your breathing still deep and easy.

Glute activation

Now we're going to do a little bit of activation of the glutes, the muscles in your buttocks. The gluteus maximus (great name) are the largest muscles in your body, but along with the other two, medius and minimus, they're often get quite unkeen to do anything at all, especially if we spend a lot of time sitting. And them being deactivated easily gets into a horrible vicious circle with your hip flexors tighten-

ing up and your pelvis tilting forwards, pulling you into a chronic not-quite-upright position and putting strain on the lower back and switching off the glutes even more. Nice stuff to avoid! So stand with your feet hip width apart, and hold the back of a chair or the edge of a table to your left if you don't want to have to worry about balance. Now lift your right foot an inch or two off the floor, and then imagine you want to move your foot back a few inches—but do not initiate this movement with your foot! Instead, make your bum do the work. You'll find that as you invite your right glute to engage, the foot drifts up naturally. If you're not sure where the movement is getting driven from, you could place your right hand on your right buttock and just check whether you feel the muscles contracting at all. If not, or not very convincingly, see whether you can do anything so you feel movement here! Once this is happening, your foot should move back automatically. Do this 10 times, holding the engagement for a couple of seconds each time before releasing and repeating, hopefully feeling the right glutes get more enthusiastic as they get used to being called on. Now switch sides, turning round so you can keep using your balance aid if you want. Lift the left foot, engage the left glute to move the foot back. You may find that one side is much less keen to get involved than the other; that's fine. Again just put your hand there to feel what's going on, and repeat 10 times, gently encouraging something other than complete laziness in the buttocks.



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And now time for the other variant on glute activation. This time, take a medium-sized step forwards with your left foot, spine tall. Now simply squeeze the right glute, and you should feel an opening-up in the front of your right hip, plus a very small back bend. Repeat this 10 times, emphasizing the glute squeeze for a couple of seconds, feeling the hip flexor opening at the front, and then releasing. Now step forward with your right foot and repeat 10 times on this second side, again just curiously observing whether one side feels easier than the other—whether the glutes are more responsive, or the psoas does more, on either side.

Hip and ankle mobility

And now relax your arms back down, and take a firm stance through the centre of your left foot, grounding yourself through the midfoot. Interlace your fingers, raise your right knee up towards your chest, and grasp your right leg just under the knee. Now don't lean down towards the knee; instead encourage the knee up towards your chest, keeping your spine nice and vertical. And engage the glutes on the left side to help yourself really stand up tall here, and open up the hip flexors on the left. You might feel some resistance around your right hip; just gently see whether it can be softened at all. If your eyes are still closed, this may be a nicely tricky balance challenge! Or if that's too hard, you can look straight ahead, or look up at the sky

for a medium level of difficulty. And now start to make circles with your right foot, first one way for 5 or 6 rotations, really getting the circumference as wide as possible, with your toes as you did earlier with your fingers... and now the other way, again 5 or 6 revolutions. And now release your right foot, ground through this right foot now, and raise your left knee, clasp the leg just below the knee, drawing it up towards your chest, and noting whether the hip is resisting more or less on this side, keeping your back tall and upright and engaging the right glutes to help you do so. And choose where to fix your gaze, if your eyes are open, or enjoy stabilizing yourself by feel alone if not. And now rotate your left foot, first one way 5 or 6 time... and now the other. And then release.

Shoulder mobility

Next, we're going to do a little realigning of the ball of your shoulder joint in its socket. A lot of mobility problems in the shoulder involve the ball of the joint coming to sit further forward than it should. Before we begin, just see how it feels when you lift your arms overhead. Extend them all the way, as if you were doing a shoulder press or reaching to grab something off a shelf directly above your head (not in front of you, right above you). Just register that feeling in your arms and shoulders. And now, take hold of your resistance band, or your scarf or whatever else you have, and hold it so you can extend



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your arms straight out to the sides, with an overhand grip, so palms down. The band should be lying on top of your chest between your neck and your nipples. Now shrug your shoulders up to your ears, keeping your arms straight, and then pull your shoulder blades together, as if you were trying to hold a pencil between them, and now drop them down, so now they're as far back and down as they can be. And now you want to externally rotate your upper arms, so turning your biceps up towards the sky. The palms of your hands will open upwards too, but that's just a side effect, just like your foot travelling backwards thanks to your glute activation. Finally, let's check you're not doing any kind of back bend here, and that your core is engaged. So imagine you're trying to spread out your abdominals to make yourself as wide as possible; you should feel them engage not in the hunching over way that happens if you imagine being punched in the gut, but more smoothly and staying more upright than that. And now that you're in this beautifully set up position, you can close your eyes if you like and if they're not already, and you're going to just do 10-12 short pulses here, pulling the band apart by drawing your hands further back. Just hold for a second or so each time, then release and repeat. And now drop your arms and relax for a moment.

And now we're going to do the same thing but with the band sitting roughly at bra strap level, just below your chest. Same procedure: overhand grip; shoulders up, back, and down; upper arms externally rotating; core spreading out to the sides; and 10-12 short pulses. And now drop your arms and shake out a little.

Now a final variant, this time with an underhand grip, so palms facing up this time. And now let the band rest around your tummy button and then repeat the same setup: shoulders up, back, and down; upper arms externally rotated, core spread out to the sides. And now 10-12 pulses here, drawing your hands back and then releasing. And now comes the fun part. Drop your band and repeat the taking-something-off-a-high-shelf movement, keeping your hands as far back as you can, directly overhead. How does it feel? Any different from the first time? For me, I always get a beautiful sense of greater ease and fluidity in this movement; I'm feeling it now, as if my shoulders had just been liberally oiled. If you don't get this, maybe your shoulder mobility is way better than mine; but maybe you can enjoy feeling something like I do.

Goblet squats

Now if you have a dumbbell, a kettlebell, or some other heavy object, make sure it's handy. We'll start without the weight, though, doing a few



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goblet squats without the goblet. So stand tall, nice wide stance with the feet, wider than your shoulders, and toes well turned out. Spine is long, head is light, gaze is straight ahead, or again eyes closed if you prefer. Shoulders are relaxed away from your ears, and shoulder blades are back and down, sitting nicely flat on the back. Now practice that excellent glute engagement again by squeezing the bum and pressing your hips gently forwards, so they're lovely and open and helping you be completely upright. To fully appreciate this, try the opposite: Let your head and shoulders drift forwards a bit, and your hips drift back a bit, so there's a very slight angle between your torso and your thighs: they're not in a straight line, 180 degrees, but maybe down to 160 or so. This is how a lot of people walk around all the time, again thanks to unhelpful feedback loops between tight hip flexors and inactive glutes. So now use your newfound glute aliveness to get back to a nice 180, or even a little more, with the front of the hips opening as the glutes do their thing. Now bring your hands to prayer position at your chest. And this is your starting position. Now the first thing that happens is that your knees start to move forwards and out to the sides, tracking over your turned-out toes. Your back is staying as utterly upright as possible, and as your knees shoot out, your torso is dropping down between the hips. Keep pressing the knees out as you descend, and you're only going to go as far as you can while keeping the back truly upright. As soon as a tilt

starts to creep in, stop there, however short a distance you've covered. If you have a bit of bare wall handy, you can test this out by standing a foot or so in front of the wall and keeping your back in contact with it as you descend. As you come back up, squeeze the bum all the way, keeping upright and keeping pressing the knees out, not letting them buckle in towards each other. And finish the movement by using the glutes to really extend the hip flexors at the front like we did before. So let's repeat this 5 times, getting to whatever depth you can while the back stays vertical. And let's build in some good breathing. So basically you don't want to be breathing while you're moving, and you want full lungs to be helping stabilize the spine. So take a deep breath at the top, filling your lungs, then keep them full until you're back to the top, then breathe out and back in again before you start the next squat. And last thing to set up well: your gaze. Fix your focus on something low down a few metres away from you, and keep it there as you move—or just close your eyes again if you prefer. So again, take a deep breath in at the top (keeping your shoulders down and relaxed), and then keep the air in until you're next back at the top. Inhale, knees track out over the toes, back tall, squeeze the bum to come back up, press hips forward, exhale, inhale, knees out, back upright, squeeze the bum, down and back up, hips forward at the top. And 3 more in your own time.



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And now let's try some to full depth, which will mean your back has to tilt forwards a bit near the bottom, but we're going to resist that for as long as possible, and keep resisting it throughout, squeezing the bum before you begin so your setup position is as vertical as possible, and then squeezing the whole way up, pressing the knees out to the sides to help with that, and keeping your eyes fixed on a single point, or closed. Ideally, to protect your knees and get full range of motion, you want to be getting deep enough that the creases of your hips end up lower than the tops of your kneecaps, i.e. "below parallel" with your thighs. Let's do 10 of these, focusing on glutes, knees out, and spine tall throughout, and pressing the hip flexors into extension and breathing out and in at the top every time. And if you like, now you can try building in a bit of explosive power, so descending with control, then shooting up out of the hole by really rapidly engaging the glutes to power the ascent. If this feels smooth and satisfying, you can keep doing it, or revert to the slower more controlled versions if you think your form is suffering at speed.

And now finally, let's get some weight involved! Pick up your heavy object, whatever it is, and bring it to your chest. If you have a kettlebell, you can grasp either side of the handle with it either right way up or inverted, or you can have it upside down and just hold the sides of the bell, whichever feels most

comfortable. With a dumbbell, turn it on its end and grasp the end by making a goblet shape with the palms of your hands up and towards each other. If you have any other object, find some convenient and symmetrical way to hold it by your chest. Now repeat the movement you were just practising, drawing your shoulder blades back and down, filling your lungs with air, pressing the hips forwards, and then letting the knees come forwards and out over the toes, pressing out with the knees and squeezing the bum as you come up, back lovely and vertical, hips forward at the top, breathe out then in, and repeat, 10 times. You can take a higher weight or a heavier object next time if you like.

Figure-four bridge

And now it's time to move onto the floor for the last few exercises. So find some space around you and lie down, on a mat if you have, or wherever else if not. Lie flat on the floor, and just feel what it's like to be horizontal after all that focus on vertical. And now place your feet flat on the floor, as close to your bum as you easily can, and palms flat on the floor either side of you. And now engage your glutes to press your hips off the floor. And now you're going to lift your right leg and place the ankle just above the left knee, right ankle resting on the left thigh and then right knee pressing down to create a figure four shape with the legs. Keeping the shoulder blades grounded, engage the left



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glute nice and firmly here, hold for a couple of seconds, then release and let your bum come back down to the floor. Now repeat 6 times, maybe with eyes closed or just fixing your gaze at a single point on the ceiling or straight up into the sky, driving the entire movement with the glute on the left side, and pressing the right knee down to really open up that hip. And synchronize your breathing, so you're breathing in as you bring your hips up, holding at the top for a few seconds, and then breathing out as you return to the floor. And now release the right ankle and lie with both feet flat on the floor for a moment. Now raise the left ankle to rest on the thigh above the right knee, and repeat, shoulder blades solid on the ground, now right glute pressing your hips up, left knee down to open the hip, inhaling on the way up, exhaling on the way down. 6 repetitions like this, and then bring your feet back to the floor.

Calf and hamstring stretch

Now a few lying-down stretches to finish. The first is for the backs of your legs. So grab your band or strap or scarf, and place the middle of it over the heel of your left foot, and then straighten that leg up towards the ceiling, holding the strap tight in both hands, shoulder blades flat on the floor, and extend the other leg out long on the floor, flexing your foot as if it were up against a wall, so you feel your calf and thigh pressing actively into the ground. And it doesn't matter

how high your left foot is, as long as the leg is completely straight. Pull gently on the strap, and you should feel a bit of a stretch through the left calf and hamstring. And hold for a few moments. Now take the strap in just your right hand, and draw your foot over to the right, so it's over your body, still nice straight leg, keeping your left buttock on the floor as much as possible, and pull gently here, and hold. And now switch the strap to the left hand, and draw the leg the other way, out away from you over to the left, and now you can let your left elbow rest on the floor, and your left leg comes as far down towards the floor as it's happy with, and gently pull here, and enjoy the stretch in the calf and hamstring as well as the opening in the inner thigh, maybe closing the eyes if they aren't already, to really sink into the stretch. And now release your foot and lie flat for a moment with both legs fully extended. Now switch the strap to your right heel, and start with your foot pulled up directly over your body, again making sure the resting left foot is against that imaginary wall and that that left leg is actually just as active as the other one. Keep the right leg nice and straight. And now switch the strap to the left hand and draw your leg over your body, keeping the tension on the strap, feeling the stretch in the outer hip, grounding through the right buttock. And now the strap moves to the right hand and you let the leg fall over to the right, as close to the floor as it wants, your right elbow resting on the floor now, tension on the strap, enjoying the double



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stretch. And then release, and lie flat on the floor again.

Lower-back rotation

Now for a little lower back rotation. So bend your left knee and draw it up to your chest, and now let it fall down to the floor on your right, your body turning with it, so you're on your right side now, the right leg extended out straight on the floor. And now use your right hand to press the bent left knee into the floor, and then extend your left arm out to the left, and turn your neck to look towards your left shoulder, and then close your eyes once you're there. And the aim is to get both the left shoulder and the left knee on the floor at the same time. But if you can't do both, prioritize the shoulder, so let that drop to the floor by releasing the knee a little, then see how close to the floor you can press the knee while still keeping the shoulder down. And stay here a while; maybe you feel some clicking or other realignment happen in the lower spine at some point, maybe not. Just relax and breathe into the rotation. ... And now second side, so come back to both feet on the floor, then extend the left leg out and bend the right knee, let it fall to the left, turn your torso that way too, press the knee down towards the floor with your left hand, and now press the right shoulder down and look over it. Then close the eyes, finding out how the twist feels on this side, whether it's easier or harder to let shoulder and knee both be on or close to the floor,

releasing the knee from the floor a bit if you need to. And hold and breathe here. And then release and come back to feet on the floor.

Happy baby

Now let's come into our penultimate lying-down pose. So lift your feet towards the sky, and bend your knees so you can thread your arms inside your knees and grab the outside edge of both feet. And then drop your hips down towards the floor, so ideally your sacrum, the base of your spine, is resting on the ground, back flat on the floor, shoulders relaxed down too, and your feet are pressing out to the sides and your hands are gently resisting them, and now you're in happy baby pose. Close your eyes if you want, and if you like you can rock gently side to side to channel your inner baby a bit more.

Wall legs

And now we're pretty much done. One final lovely way to ground yourself can be to use the right angle of floor and wall. So find a clear bit of wall, sit on the floor facing it, as close as possible, then lie down and swing your legs up to rest straight against the wall, scooting yourself a bit closer if you want. You can stay here if you like it, or bring the soles of your feet together into butterfly. Make sure your shoulder blades are flat on the floor, and let your hands rest with palms facing



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skywards, and close your eyes and stay here as long as you like, feeling how your body is right now, feeling how you are, for there is nothing of you that isn't this collection of cells and fibres right here, right now. Breathe, doze, do whatever you like to be this body for a little longer, before the world comes crowding back in to make you forget it.