

Get Up!

By Scott Lohmann, Instructor, Adaptive P.E.

Are you having trouble getting up from your couch or recliner? This is a common problem as we age --we lose the ability to move efficiently and as confidently as we did when we were younger. But is age really the factor that limits our movement and level of function? It certainly contributes to the regression, yet it is not the primary cause. So what is?

Loss of muscle mass is the biggest threat to everyone's quality of life. Simply, losing muscle will directly impact your ability to live a free and functional life. But which muscles impact your movement most, and what can we do? For some of you it may come as a surprise, but to anyone who's worked with me, you will know it's the butt muscles that are the most important. The butt muscles (gluteus muscles) are 360 degree muscles. They allow you to not only sit down and stand up safely but they also allow you to move laterally. That's important because sometimes you have to move sideways to get around other people. Most important of all is that butt muscles stabilize your hips so you can safely keep your feet grounded and avoid dangerous falls.

Pelvic Bridging and Chair Squats are two great ways to develop butt strength. Start with Pelvic Bridging. It is best to do this exercise on the floor; however, if you cannot safely transfer up and down from the ground, they can be performed in bed on a firm mattress. Start the exercise on your back with your knees bent and feet flat. Make sure there is at least 2 to 3 inches between your feet and knees. Contract your butt muscles and lift your hips up off the ground while making sure your feet stay flat. Once your hips are off the ground and you're in a bridge, slowly lower yourself down and repeat the process. Make sure your knees don't sway back and forth while you are performing the exercise. If they are, you may want to place a ball or yoga block between the legs. Try to perform this exercise for 2 sets of 20 repetitions.

To perform Chair Squats, find a chair that is sturdy and high enough to perform squats. If your chair is too low you can always add a cushion or a phone book to control the depth of the squat. Move the chair against a wall or a pillar that firmly secures the chair, eliminating the risk of a fall. Stand in front of the chair and make sure your feet are pointed comfortably forward under your hips. Slowly bring your butt back and lower down into the chair. Do not collapse into the chair; make sure you engage your butt and hamstring muscles (back of thighs) as you lower yourself down to the chair. Also, avoid bending only in the knees. Bringing the butt back will engage the butt and legs more, taking the weight load off of the knees.

As you become better at these exercises you will find it much easier to get out of your chair or couch. I hope you enjoyed this article; next time I will talk about how to improve your shoulder function and reduce pain!