



Buttocks have
a serious side
— they support
our spine and
help us move.

The *bottom* line

You can stop your derriere heading south, writes physiotherapist ANNA-LOUISE BOUVIER

Bottoms are interesting, amusing and sometimes depressing. Comedians through the ages (and many 12-year-old boys) have drawn years of great material from exploring the ins and outs of the buttock.

But buttocks have their serious side. They play an important role in keeping us upright, supporting our spines and helping us to move. Our sedentary lifestyle, however, means many of us are literally losing our bottoms.

Shape

After 20 years as a physiotherapist, examining thousands of clients in their underwear, I have divided buttock shapes into three main scientific categories: the Pear, the Peach and the Pikelet. There are combination bottoms such as a pear-shaped pikelet.

Bottom shape is largely genetic, though some aspects can be related to race. For example, some cultural groups are predisposed to having large, firm, peach bottoms (which provide power for sports such as running). However, some aspects of size are affected by diet as the buttock is made up of layers. Women tend to spot-store fat on their bottoms.

The Pear

- Very curvy and comely when young.
- Ripens by spreading sideways.
- Often accompanied by saddlebags on thighs.

The Peach

- High set and very firm.
- Often seen on athletes.
- Migrates down the back of the leg with age.
- May have some fur if male.

The Pikelet (aka the Shovel)

- Flat and often slightly spread out in shape.
- Hard to find pants that fit well.
- Can result in exposure of the gluteal cleft, or plumber's crack, when bending.

What's in a buttock

The buttocks have three main layers. The outer layer can be seen as the storage facility (in case of famine), while the next two layers sound

more like something out of *Gladiator* and have very specific and varied roles.

Outer layer: Consists of skin, adipose tissue (fat) +/- cellulite. This layer provides padding.

Middle layer: Consists of gluteus maximus an extensor of the hip. It is a powerful muscle for walking squatting and running and a retrorocket for dynamic activities.

Deepest layer: Comprises the gluteus medius and minimus, the "intellectuals" of the team. These are the low-grade controllers of the side-to-side position of the pelvis. They should be on all the time and stop the hip from "dropping" to the side.

Causes of derriere droop

Gravity, age, poor posture (especially if you stand like a gorilla), disuse (especially lack of dynamic upright activities such as walking, climbing stairs, bending and lifting), sitting too much.

Postures that turn your buttock complex off

1 Standing like Victoria Beckham with all your weight slumped on one leg has the combined effect of switching off the deep buttock muscles and weakening your postural muscles around your stomach. This posture is practised by teenagers and models and is

leading to weaker bottoms at an earlier age.

2 Walking like Marilyn Monroe, while it may attract gentlemen, also turns off the gluteus medius and minimus as the hips drop from side to side. Again, a popular runway look copied by teenagers the world over.

3 Running in the shuffling style of Cliff Young, dropping the chest or not pushing back through the hips, causes the gluteus maximus to turn off. Hence you sometimes see very fit runners with flabby behinds.

What happens when your buttocks weaken?

- Pears and Peaches tend to become larger, softer and more dimply. Pikelets tend to disappear altogether.
- Because they are important for the mechanics of the back and pelvis, weak buttocks are a big contributor to chronic back pain and sciatica.
- Weakness in the gluteus medius and minimus is often compensated for by spasm and tightness in some of the other deep muscles in the hip. This results in an acutely tender spot in the buttocks.
- If the gluteus maximus is weak, the body tries to compensate by increasing the load on the hamstring and calf muscles, which in turn become overly tight and difficult to stretch.

4 WAYS TO A BETTER BEHIND

1 Use two legs. Always stand with your weight evenly on both legs (and slightly back into your heels).

2 Don't lean. The more you support yourself against gravity the more your postural muscles will switch on. Give up leaning against walls and propping yourself against the kitchen bench.

3 Lead with your heels. Whenever you walk, be purposeful in how you place

your foot. This helps activate the gluteus maximus muscle and makes you extend your hip more efficiently.

4 Push through your toes when climbing stairs. The buttock complex plays a big role in propelling you upstairs. Think about pushing yourself up the stairs (with your chest up and shoulders back) rather than dragging yourself up with your hands on the rail.

Bottoms up

Want to work on lifting those buttocks and discovering your outer Kylie? Try this routine three times a week.

Chair hover



Lifts and strengthens the gluteus maximus and stomach and back muscles

- Sit on the edge of a firm chair.
- Lean forward until your bottom lifts off the seat (*do not* swing yourself up).
- Hover about 10cm above the seat for five slow breaths.
- Do not let your knees drop in together or go too far out to the side.
- Gently lower your bottom back on the seat. *Do not* drop.
- Repeat five times.

Stepping lunge

Lifts and strengthens the gluteus maximus and leg muscles

- Stand tall and take a step with your right foot.
- Bring your weight forward until your left heel lifts off the ground and your left knee bends a little.
- Tighten your left buttock as much as you can while keeping your left knee soft.
- Stick your left hand into your buttock to remind you to keep it squeezed tight.
- Drop down by bending your knees a little to a count of three, then come up slowly to a count of three.
- Repeat five times each leg.

NB: If you have dodgy knees, skip the up and down part of this exercise

Standing tall

Activates the deepest buttock muscle and stabilises the hip and pelvis

- Stand tall.
- Lift one leg off the ground until the hip is a little under 90 degrees (if your balance is poor you can hold onto the kitchen bench for a little support).
- Hold this position by drawing your tummy in and lifting up and out of your standing hip.
- Hold for five slow breaths.
- Repeat five times each leg.

