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[Help those hockey hips: Core control and balance are key to playing speedy game](#)

By Rob Williams, The Province November 23, 2011



Drop lunges: When you land, your weight should be evenly split between both feet, with your hips and glutes active and your core engaged. Holding the hockey stick in front of you will help with your balance.

Photograph by: Submitted, The Province

I'm always inspired by the number of local men and women who play hockey on a regular basis. There's no doubt that skating can be challenging enough, let alone playing a fast game of hockey. Because of the frequent lateral movements, sharp turns and change of direction, it's important that hockey players have strong hips and good balance, as well as excellent core control.

This week, my team of practitioners from Performance Posture Clinic and I are supporting a great charity event named Hockey Helps the Homeless. There will be roughly 200 Vancouver business people playing in an all-day tournament at UBC, raising money for a very worthy cause. My practitioners and I will be providing athlete support services for the players, helping them to stay healthy throughout the day.

With the instability of skates and the agility required to out-manoeuvre other players on the ice, anyone who tries to play with muscle weakness or imbalance can get themselves into trouble and get injured. At the very least, they won't perform to the best of their ability.

This week I'm presenting three office, hockey-specific movements that target the hips, as demonstrated by Mixx trainer and certified athletic therapist Scott Marchant. A couple of these moves are fairly advanced, so be careful to use good form and excellent body control at all times.

Always remember to perform a thorough warm-up before exercise, and consult your physician before starting or changing your fitness program.

LATERAL STRIDES

More than most other sports, hockey is a game of lateral movement. The skating stride requires power and control at the hip joints for accelerating, crossing over, carving and stopping. Building strong lateral hips is something that can help your game immensely.

Lateral strides over a hurdle or a cone are simple, and the level of difficulty can be gradually increased to tolerance. One of the most important things to monitor is the alignment of your body as you move from side to side. Begin by standing on the left side of a cone with your hockey stick in hand and body in a neutral athletic position.

Initiate the movement by firing your left hip/glute musculature and jumping sideways across to the right side of the cone, landing on your right leg.

Absorb the lateral movement and impact with your big leg muscles, while keeping your hips square and spine upright and tall. Be careful not to let your torso lean outward past your pelvis as you fire your right hip/glute muscles to propel you back over to the left side of the cone. Keeping your core engaged will help your alignment. Perform two sets of 30 lateral strides.

DROP LUNGES

This variation on lunges requires large hip movements and serious body control. Start by standing tall with your feet together and the end of your hockey stick in your right hand, then lift your right knee up toward your chest and pause in this leg-up position.

From here, drop your pelvis back and slightly to the right side as you fall back and down onto your right leg, landing in the wide lunge position shown in the photo on this page.

Be careful not to "reach" back with your leg. When you land, your weight should be evenly split between both feet, with your hips and glutes active and your core engaged.

From this finish position, press back upward to the tall, leg-up position, before dropping back again. Perform 10 repetitions before switching to the other side. Holding the hockey stick in front of you will help your balance.

HOCKEY CRISS-CROSS

A hockey player's hips will end up in all kinds of positions during a game, and the player must be conditioned to rise to the challenge.

This criss-cross drill is difficult, and because of the body positions and impact, I wouldn't recommend it for anyone with serious hip, knee or ankle issues.

Begin by standing over a line on the floor, or a hockey stick, and assume a lunge position, with your right foot forward. Now, move your right foot over to the left side of the stick, and your left foot across to the right side of the stick, leaving you in the crossover position shown in the photo. This is your start position.

Keeping your pelvis and spine in neutral alignment, with your core engaged, quickly fire your hip and leg muscles to switch the position of your feet, with your left leg coming forward and right leg back, landing in the opposite crossover position.

Pause briefly to check your alignment and stability before firing again and returning to the start position. Always keep your torso facing forward. If you use a hockey stick, be careful with your foot placement to avoid hitting or tripping over the stick. Perform 2 sets of 20 repetitions.

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