

# SHOULDER BRIDGE



*“The acquirement and enjoyment of physical well-being, mental calm and spiritual peace are priceless to their possessors...”*

This is a personal favourite and I’ve always enjoyed how astonished clients are when they can’t even lift one foot off the ground. This is another deceptively difficult exercise which does so much. In an advanced class using the original order of exercise, this follows Bicycle and if you have the flexibility in the hamstrings, the mobility through the spine and the strength in the core to control the movement, you can stay in the shoulder stand position and bring the foot of the bent leg down to the floor to set up for the Shoulder Bridge!

## Anatomy

- Core strength and stability.
- Strength for the hamstrings and glutes.
- Flexibility for the hamstrings and hip flexors.
- If you roll up to start, roll down midway to switch legs or roll through the spine after every repetition in the beginner levels, you decompress the spine and give it a good stretch.

## Method – 5 repetitions each leg or 5 sets alternating

- If you don't use the advanced set up described above whether because of difficulty level or order of exercises, start in supine with a neutral pelvis. Knees are bent and a little closer to your body than you would naturally have them, arms stretched alongside your body, or for more of a challenge, folded across your chest or back behind you.
- As you exhale, press down through your feet, tilt the pelvic and peel your spine one vertebrae at a time, off the mat, aligning your spine in neutral position.
- As you inhale stretch a leg (toe pointed) to the ceiling, flex the foot and as you exhale, stretch it away as you lower the leg as far as you can without the hips moving. Alternate or for an advanced version build to all 5 reps each leg.

## Teaching Tips

- Press the supporting foot firmly into the ground to activate the glutes so that your hip doesn't drop when you lift your foot off the ground.
- As the leg stretches back towards the face, cue to stretch tailbone away and stabilize the pelvis to keep both sides of the body equally lengthened.
- Only clients with long quads and hip flexors will be able to take the leg below the height of the supporting thigh whilst maintaining a stable pelvis.
- Cue to relax neck and almost pull themselves forward a millimeter to stop "sliding" into the neck.
- Knees will wander outwards so cue to find the ball and inside edge of the foot. You could place a small ball between the knees and cue to just extend alternate legs and lower for those who have a problem maintaining legs hip distance apart. Take care though: tight quads are often the cause of knee pain and problems, so whilst good to stretch them, it may have to be done slowly over a number of weeks or months.

## Modifications

- Peel the spine off the mat and roll back down to start with.
- Progress with heel lift and lower right and alternate to test stability.
- The next level would be to stretch a leg straight up and bend to replace on the floor, alternating.
- Once clients get to multiples, roll down and back up between changing to the other side.
- For discomfort in the knees, roll up a towel and place under the toes so that the weight is through the heels. Or cue to reduce range.

## Imagery

- Hips suspended in the air.
- For rolling: picking up a string of pearls and laying them down.
- Paint a stripe on the wall and ceiling then rub it out with your heel on the way down.