

jazzercise

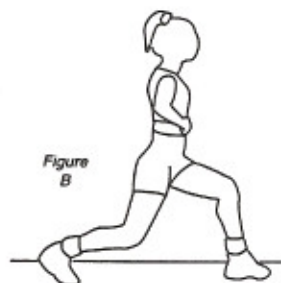
Lunges... How Low Do You Go?

"How low should I go?" is a common question regarding lunge/plies.



Answer: "To the point where you can maintain proper form." (See Figure A) Most important is maintaining the spine's natural curves, also called a "neutral spine."

Now study Figure B. The pelvis is anteriorly tilted, creating an arch in the lower back (hyperlordosis). Also notice how the curves in the upper back and neck have become more prominent to compensate for the pelvis.



Would the solution be for her to maintain a neutral spine? Ultimately, yes. But she can't keep her pelvis in neutral because her hip flexors are too tight! She is unable to bend the front knee to 80 or 90 degrees without being pulled out of alignment by tight muscles.

Her solution is two fold:

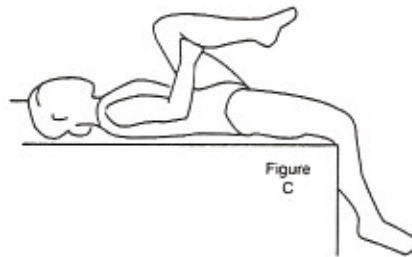
- 1) Stretch the hip flexors and increase awareness of body mechanics.
- 2) Until her flexibility increases, lower only to the point where the pelvis remains stable.

Can you get a deeper sense of the importance of stretching and flexibility? It's a vital, often neglected step, to ensuring a healthy body. You're an injury waiting to happen if lack of mobility pulls your body out of alignment. We could study many movements to see how inflexible muscles can create injuries. But for now, let's target the hip flexor.

The hip flexor crosses the front of the hip and attaches on the spine. When it is short/tight and the exerciser is unable to use the abdominals to oppose their forward pull on the spine, the pelvis goes into an undesirable anterior tilt.

Another portion of the hip flexor crosses both the hip joint and the knee joint. Now, look at the back leg again. Notice the large range of motion and flexibility that is required of this muscle to allow freedom of movement while stretching over both joints. If it's too tight, it will help pull the pelvis into an anterior tilt.

Here's a simple test you can do to see if your hip flexors are tight: Start by sitting on a table with your knees over the edge. Lie down on your back and hold one knee toward your chest at a 45 degree angle, as pictured in Figure C. The other thigh should lie flat on the table with the knee bent. If the knee straightens, the rectus femoris is tight. If the thigh lifts from the table, the iliopsoas is tight.



Moral of the story:

- "Proper form" will be the answer to most questions on how low to go, how high to go, how many reps to do, how much weight to lift, etc.
- Don't skimp on stretching, particularly the large muscles acting on the hip/pelvis such as the iliopsoas, rectus femoris and hamstrings. For improvements in flexibility, stretch them after they're warmed up, - such as during the Aerobic Cool-Down and Post-Routine periods of class.