

8 Eccentric Hamstring Exercises

Here are some eccentric hamstring exercises for you to try. For additional information, check out our hamstring strengthening exercises PDF, hamstring stretches PDF, and hamstring rehab exercises PDF. You can use the latter two PDFs when recovering from a hamstring strain or hamstring injury.

1. Eccentric Nordic Curls

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_Egn_3CCsM&ab_channel=BenBenson

Nordic curls suck in all the best ways. They are hard, they can take time to learn and get right, and they can leave you wincing on the floor with a hamstring strain, unable to stand up. And that's why they are great!

You've likely seen them - your feet anchored into a pad behind you so you can lower your upper body all the way forward and use your hamstrings to curl yourself back up. It looks like a biceps curl, but your hamstrings are your biceps. To do them in an eccentric fashion, we simply extend the tempo or duration of the downward portion.

How To Do It

- Using a Nordic hamstring curl apparatus, anchor your feet under the pad as you kneel on the other end of the equipment.
- Bending only at the knee (not the hip), lower your upper body to the floor. Be sure this eccentric portion lasts for the desired tempo (e.g., 5 seconds).
- Get as close to the floor as you can and then pull yourself back upright, again bending only at the knee.
- If the negative portion leaves you too tired to complete the return back to your starting point, have a spotter assist you back to the top and perform just the eccentric reps.

Benefits

These bad boys really, REALLY isolate your hamstrings, so that very few other muscles are actively working to complete the lift. When you keep your hips locked the right way, the hamstrings must do all the work to lower your body and bring it back up.

By exaggerating the eccentric, lifters who are unable to complete a full rep can begin to build the strength to eventually get there. For lifters who can already do full reps, the eccentrics can strengthen them without introducing load.

Drawbacks

You need a Nordic curl bench or apparatus to do these. Sure, you might find a creative way to wedge your feet under something heavy or have a friend stand on your toes to hack them,

but make sure your spotter knows what they are doing and is ideally heavier than you so your feet don't slip out and you fall on your face!

2. Eccentric GHD

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y CFRXn-kGE0&ab_channel=NickEllemsPerformance

The **[GHD \(glute and ham developer\)](#)** is similar to a Nordic curl bench but is elevated off the floor. In addition to targeting the hamstrings, exercises can be altered to create an **[eccentric glute exercise](#)** or to target the abs, erector spinae, and obliques.

How To

- To perform eccentric hamstring strengthening exercises on the GHD, climb up on the bench and secure your feet in the pads at the back.
- You'll want your quads/lower thighs to rest against the front pad, not your hips, so you may need to adjust the rear footplate to slide forward to allow for this positioning.
- Bend only at the knee as you lower yourself forward. Allow the downward tempo to meet your program's requirements (3 seconds, for example), and then return to an upright position.
- Avoid bending at the hip, as this will distract you from focusing on the hamstrings.
- Repeat for reps.

Benefits

Similar to the Nordic curl, the GHD hamstring eccentric curl is a great way to isolate the hamstrings and strengthen these muscles to reduce the risk of future hamstring strains.

With the GHD being more elevated (usually about 3 feet off the ground), it's much easier to have a spotter assist you on the way back up, like by pushing on your shoulders once you reach the bottom of the rep. You can have spotters assist you with each upward portion of the lift so you can focus on controlled, slow eccentrics.

Drawbacks

This requires a specialized piece of equipment that not every public gym has, and even fewer people have in their [home gyms](#). Without access to the equipment, you simply won't be able to do these exercises.

If you don't have access to a GHD machine, check out these [glute ham raise alternatives](#).

3. Eccentric Deadlift

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Xjzx-eLbSk&ab_channel=VIPAR

Although the internet will debate whether a [deadlift is a hamstring exercise or a back exercise](#), you don't need to get caught up in the fight because the answer is both, and it's a great one to apply eccentrics to if you want to target your hamstrings.

As we uncovered earlier, eccentrics can improve strength on the concentric, so training negative deadlifts is a great way to [make your regular deadlift stronger](#), especially in your hamstrings.

How To

- Perform a deadlift as you normally would by stepping up to the bar with your feet shoulder-width apart.
- Bend your knees and bend forward at the hip to grab the bar with your arms fully extended. Your back should be at about a 45-degree angle.
- Holding on to the bar, press your feet into the floor and stand up until the barbell meets your hips and you're standing upright.
- Lower the bar in the same path as you stood it up for the programmed amount of time (like a 5-second eccentric tempo, for example).
- Repeat for reps.

Benefits

The deadlift is a great hamstring exercise, so adding eccentrics is a great strategy to strengthen your hamstrings and prepare them for even bigger, stronger deadlifts in the future.

Additionally, the deadlift is generally a familiar exercise to most lifters, and it can be done with minimal specialized equipment. Most lifters can easily exaggerate their eccentric tempo and add this exercise to their program.

Drawbacks

The deadlift is a compound lift, not an isolated lift, meaning the hamstrings are just one of many muscle groups working to complete each rep.

That's great for many reasons, but in this case, it may make it difficult for lifters to target their hamstrings and ensure they're hitting the muscle as much as they want.

If this is the case for you, you may want to try some of my other recommended exercises.

Do your hamstrings get excessively sore after deadlifts? I discuss why this happens and how you can fix it in [Hamstrings Sore After Deadlifts: Is This Good Or Bad?](#)

4. Eccentric Stiff-Leg Deadlift/RDL

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CN_7cz3P-1U&ab_channel=RenaissancePeriodization

The stiff-leg deadlift or [Romanian deadlift](#) (RDL) are deadlift variations that call for the lifter to avoid bending at the knee during a deadlift. While they are slightly different, their effect on the hamstrings are similar, so I've bundled them together here.

By hinging only at the hip in the [Romanian deadlift](#), we can target different muscle groups, like your hamstrings. Again, we'll simply slow down the eccentric portion to the desired tempo to modify these for our purposes.

How To

- Step up to a barbell just as you would for a deadlift with your feet about shoulder-width apart.
- Bend your knees only slightly.
- Bending at the hip, reach down for the bar.
- Your back should be almost parallel to the ground since your knees are not bent as much as a normal deadlift.
- Pick up the weight with your arms straight, bend at the hip, and push your hips forward until you are standing upright with the barbell at your hips.
- Lower the bar back to the ground slowly, following the prescribed eccentric tempo. Push your hips backward as you lower the bar to the floor.
- Repeat for reps.

Benefits

This [deadlift variation](#) allows you to focus even more on the hamstrings than a standard deadlift. We remove our quads from the movement by keeping our knees fixed at the same angle the whole time and making our hips do the bending.

Therefore, these are a great addition to a [deadlift program](#) to grow and strengthen your hamstrings to keep the risk of a hamstring strain or hamstring injury low, whether for appearance or deadlift performance goals.

Drawbacks

The stiff-leg deadlift and RDL can also be used to strengthen the erectors and lower back. I find I can target more of my hamstrings or more of my lower back based on the flexion of my knee (more bent versus less bent), but it takes some practice and familiarity to do this.

If you have a hard time [feeling your hamstrings in the stiff-leg deadlift or Romanian deadlift](#), you may want to try some more straightforward options first, like a leg curl machine.

5. Eccentric Seated/Lying Leg Curl

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1NWaGwsZpc&ab_channel=TestosteroneNation

Probably the easiest way to hit your hamstrings with eccentrics is using a machine designed to isolate your hamstrings, like the [seated or lying leg curl machine](#). Simply slow down your descent of the load, and you've got yourself an eccentric variation.

How To

- Sit or lie on the machine as the instructions show. Fix your feet on the pad so you can curl the weight up (from a lying position) or curl it down (from a seated position).
- Curl the weight until your knee is fully flexed.
- As you extend your knee back to the straight position, follow the prescribed eccentric tempo (e.g., 5 seconds from flexed to extended).
- Repeat for reps.

Benefits

It's hard to mess up the hamstring targeting on these machines, which makes them great for all ability levels. Anyone can sit or lie on one of these machines, follow the instructions, and hit their hamstrings.

By applying the eccentric, you can put lots of tension on your hamstrings without having to make the load too heavy, which for me, is good news for my joints. I find much less ache in my knees by doing lighter eccentrics to failure than really heavy reps at a normal tempo.

Drawbacks

I can't think of many drawbacks here, other than the need for a specific machine or two. Most gyms (even small hotel gyms) have a leg curl machine of some kind, but that won't always be the case. You may find yourself selecting [leg curl alternatives](#) if you're in a gym without a leg curl machine.

Wat a leg curl alternative? Check out this article on the [17 Best Leg Curl Alternatives \(Dumbbell, At Home, Cable\)](#).

6. Eccentric Standing Leg Curl

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z053-kKjesQ&ab_channel=ScottHermanFitness

Another great machine is the standing leg curl machine. I really like this one because it can only be done one leg at a time. It's possible to do a seated or lying leg curl machine unilaterally, but people don't always do that, so the standing leg curl is there to force you to do it every once in a while!

How To

- Step up to the machine and place the curl pad/arm behind your ankle.
- Set your desired weight and curl your leg upward until your knee is fully flexed.

- Lower the pad as you straighten your knee, following the recommended tempo for the eccentric (like 6 seconds, for example).
- Repeat for reps.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Benefits

I love the unilateral requirement here because you can find and treat your imbalances. It also allows for some fun variations where one leg rests while the other works, giving you little to no rest time between legs.

By adding the eccentric, we get all the stated benefits we've discussed while perfectly isolating our hamstrings, one leg at a time. No need to learn a new movement, no need to think too hard about which muscle you're actually hitting with the right technique to lower the risk of hamstring strains. Just plug and play hamstring work.

Drawbacks

This machine is even less common in most public gyms I've seen, but I've also been in gyms where it's the only hamstring-focused machine, so it's a roll of the dice on availability.

If you don't have one, you can try using ankle weights or some other way to attach the load to your feet (like putting your foot through a kettlebell handle) and perform them that way.

7. Eccentric Cable Leg Curl

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDgURnnfC8c&ab_channel=TestosteroneNation

Even without dedicated machines, you can still use a good old cable machine to get a leg curl in! Since cable machines are very, very common in most gyms, you'll be able to do this variation in a pinch.

How To

- Lie on your belly on the floor, facing away from the cable.
- Attach an ankle/foot attachment between your foot and the cable.
- Flex your knee and curl your foot toward your butt as you pull on the cable.
- Lower your foot back down at the prescribed tempo (3-6 seconds, usually).
- Repeat for reps.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Benefits

With a lack of specialized equipment, the cable leg curl comes in clutch for folks wanting to train their hamstrings more!

Heavy loads might make it hard to hold your position on the ground (the weight could literally drag/scoot you back toward the pulley), so using lighter weight and applying eccentric tempo is a perfect solution to get a great hamstring pump without making things awkward in the gym.

Drawbacks

These take up space, and you might hesitate to lie face down on the floor of a public gym just to do a hamstring exercise. If the other pulleys are occupied, you may not have much space to do these.

Second, you may need to bring your own [cable ankle attachment](#), as it's not a common one that gyms provide on their own.

Finally, as I mentioned, it may be difficult to hold your position on the floor without the cable and weights pulling you toward the pulley if you need heavier weight to get more intensity. It's unlikely you'll have something to grasp with your hands, so there is a limit to how much load you can apply with these.

8. Eccentric Banded Leg Curl

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEg4ihYJpSE&ab_channel=KylePignatiello

When all else fails, I've almost always been able to get banded leg curls done in a pinch. Whether my gym doesn't have hamstring-specific machines, or they're all occupied, and I don't have time to wait, I can pull a band out of my bag, loop it around a [squat rack](#) or another anchored base, and knock out reps with eccentric temps for a great pump.

How To

- Loop a band through itself around an anchored post, like a squat rack or another machine.
- Lie on your belly on the floor, away from the band, with the band looped around your foot or ankle.
- Curl your leg toward your butt as you pull against the band.
- Lower your leg back down, following the programmed eccentric tempo.
- Repeat for reps.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Benefits

You can do these almost anywhere! Seriously, I've done these on business trips in a hotel gym that only had treadmills and a few small dumbbells. I've done these at home, and I've done them at a busy gym when everything else was occupied at the time.

Adding the eccentric tempo makes the burn even more effective and satisfying and means I don't need to carry anything more than a light or medium tension band with me.

Drawbacks

The band's tension is inconsistent, so it will be tighter at the top when your knee is bent and looser at full extension. You'll need to adjust your position to ensure sufficient tension as you get closer to full extension to ensure you're getting resistance throughout the lift.

With cables and machine alternatives, the tension remains constant throughout the range of motion, making these trickier to get right. You may also fatigue faster dealing with the dynamic tension over steady tension.

It can also be annoying to keep the band on your ankle or foot as you perform the eccentric hamstring curls.

How To Program Hamstring Eccentrics



I recommend applying eccentrics to hamstring exercises to maximize your gains and reduce the risk of hamstring strains in two main ways:

- **Accessory exercises**
- **Forced reps**

Accessory Exercises

Accessory exercises are exercises that support the day's main exercise.

In most [powerlifting or strength programs](#), the workout revolves around a main compound lift, like a deadlift. Once we've done our deadlift sets, we want to keep working muscles involved in the deadlift by doing [isolation exercises](#). This is what we call accessory exercises.

On a deadlift workout, I'd give myself 1-2 exercises for 3-4 sets, each focused on the hamstrings. I would do the first one with a normal load and tempo and save the eccentrics for the last exercise.

When all my energy is nearly spent, I'm at the end of my workout, and I can't lift the same weight I could when I started the workout, it's the perfect time to do an exercise with lighter weight and extended eccentric tempos to get more work in and keep the intensity high without risking a hamstring strain injury.

Now is the time I'd add some eccentric leg curls of any variation! I'd typically focus my accessory sets on 8-16 rep ranges so I can focus more on working the muscle to fatigue and not on controlling really heavy weight for technically difficult movements like I do with main exercise work.

Forced Reps

Forced reps is a term used in bodybuilding. It's when a lifter can't complete any more reps of their own strength, so their spotter applies help to get a few more reps out.

The idea is that you can keep your muscles engaged beyond their own abilities and train them to develop beyond their current limitations without getting hamstring strains. Eventually, the lifter can do all those reps without assistance as the assistance is removed.

We can get the same effect with eccentrics. Since most lifters can continue to do the eccentric portion of a lift even after they fail to complete the concentric portion, we can treat these negative reps like forced reps and get a few more reps out of our set.

If you have spotters available to help you get the weight back up and reset each rep, you can continue to get a few more eccentric reps at the end of your set, no matter where the exercise is in your workout, early or at the end.

Personally, I often only need one good, long eccentric as a final rep of my sets to get the last bit of ability I have before needing to rest.

Write these into your program like this:

- Deadlifts - 4x5, 5-second eccentric on last rep

Or

- Seated leg curls - 3x8, 5-second negative on each rep

Sample Eccentric Hamstring Workout



There are many, many ways you can program eccentrics, but here's an example of how you can use them throughout a workout:

- Deadlifts - 4 sets of 5 reps, 75% of 1RM
- Eccentric deadlifts - 3 sets of 5 reps, 5-second negative, 50-60% of 1RM
- Assisted Nordic curls - 3 sets of AMRAP - 3-second negatives, assisted concentric
- Banded leg curls - 3 sets of 8, 5-second negative tempo

And here's an example where we save it for the end:

- Deadlifts - 4 sets of 5 reps, 75% of 1RM
- Paused deadlifts - 3 sets of 5 reps, 65% of 1RM
- Assisted Nordic curls - 3 sets of AMRAP
- Banded leg curls - 3 sets of 8, 5-second negative tempo