

Sailing Fit

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Your legs make up one of the largest muscle groups in the body. If your legs get tired the rest of your body will tire shortly after. Since hiking and sailing in general requires you to use your legs so much they will most likely be one of the first areas of your body to get tired. If you can increase the strength in your legs you will be able to increase your overall endurance when sailing. There are many ways to increase the power in your legs. One of the most obvious is through aerobic exercise. This can include any of the following:

- Walking
- Running
- Kickboxing
- Tennis
- Swimming
- Bicycling
- Basketball
- Football

I think you get the idea. There are many activities that we do without even realizing what muscles we are working. The next group of activities is also one of the most recognized. These are the ones performed with strength training equipment most often found in a gym or home gym. Examples of these would include the following:

- Leg Press
- Leg Extensions
- Hyperextensions
- Abductor/Adductor Presses
- Smith Squat

Seeing as these two groups of activities require a block of time or the use of equipment I would like to focus on are the ones that you can do anywhere without the use of additional equipment in a reasonable amount of time. The first is what is called a Wall Sit. This is an isometric exercise performed to strengthen the quadriceps. You will start by bending the knees at a 90degree angle and placing your back flat against the wall. Your hamstrings should be parallel to the floor. Start by holding this position for thirty seconds. Then stand up and stretch your legs out. When I use this exercise when training someone I have them perform three sets standing up and stretching their legs in between each set. The first set for thirty seconds, the second for one minute, and the

third for one minute thirty seconds. I would use these increments as a guideline. You should feel a burn in your quadriceps. You shouldn't perform it until the point of pain or if you feel any discomfort in the knees.

Leg lifts are a pretty simple exercise that can be performed in a variety of ways and have many benefits. One variation is a side leg lift. Here you will lay on your side with your bottom leg bent behind you at the knee and the top leg kept straight. You will want to put your bottom arm straight at your side slightly in front of you so you are not laying on it and your top arm with your palm on the floor to provide some stability. To perform the exercise you will slowly lift your top leg to the side about 12", hold for the count of ten and slowly lower it back down to touch your bottom leg. Start with one set of 10-12 repetitions and work up to three sets of 15-20 repetitions. Perform the exercise lying on both sides so each leg gets worked equally. To increase the intensity of this exercise you can lift your leg to the side about 12" and then lower it so it is about an inch from your bottom leg. By not letting your legs touch you are keeping constant tension on the working muscle never letting it rest.

Another version of the leg lift will not only work your legs but your hip flexor muscles, your stomach, back and glutes. In this version you will lay flat on your back with your arms at your sides. I would recommend a semi-hard surface such as on a mat or blanket on the floor. If you lay on a mattress or cushion you will sink into it and take away from the strength gained from and needed to perform the exercise. Once you are laying flat bring your legs up so the soles of your feet are facing the ceiling and you are bent at your hips at a 90degree angle. Remember to keep your legs together and straight and to also keep your back and butt on the floor. Now slowly lower your legs until they are about an inch off of the floor and then slowly raise them back up to the starting position. While doing this it will help if you think of pulling your abdominal muscles inward and upward to keep your lower back flat on the floor. Repeat this until you cannot complete the full lowering and raising movement. Shoot for doing two more repetitions than you did the previous time each time you perform this exercise.

One of the exercises that I like the most to work the legs is a lunge. This is another movement that can be performed in a variety of ways. Once you know the basic movement you can build on it from there. To start stand upright with your feet shoulder width apart. Now step forward with your right foot placing it flat on the floor in front of you. Then lower your hips so that the knee behind you is about 2-3" off the floor and the right knee is at a 90degree angle. Do not let your right knee bend so that the knee is over your toes. Your knee should be in a straight line with your ankle. Now push off with your right foot while raising your hips back up and bring yourself back to the starting position. Repeat this movement stepping forward with the left leg. Do three sets of twenty repetitions alternating left and right legs. You will feel this exercise in your thighs, back and butt. Once you are a master of the basic lunge try doing the exact same movement holding a 15-20 pound dumbbell in each hand. You can increase the

weight to one that is comfortable yet a challenge for you. You could also use a barbell placing it across your shoulders instead of dumbbells.

In another version you can use a step or a platform to increase the difficulty. In this version you do the same move only stepping backward not forward. Start with both feet on the edge of the step or platform. Now step back with your right foot placing the ball of your foot on the floor and then lowering your hips so your right knee is 2-3" off the floor. Remember to keep your left knee in line with your left ankle. Now push off with your right foot straightening both legs and raising your hips so that you are returned to the starting position. Perform this exercise alternating between right and left legs. Once this becomes comfortable you may also add weight using dumbbells or a barbell.

To get a complete leg workout you should also work your calve muscles. The easiest way to do this is to do calve raises. Find a step and place both of your feet on it so that only the balls of your feet are on the step and the heels of your feet are hanging off. It is good to place your hands on a railing or wall to the side for balance. Now raise yourself up so that your weight is on the balls of your feet. Your heel should be higher than your toes. Then lower yourself so that your heels are lower than your toes and your calves are stretched. These movements should be generated from your calves without help from the hands you have placed on the railing or wall for balance. Do three sets of twenty repetitions. You will feel a burn in your calves. Don't worry these muscles recover quickly and it will stop a few seconds after you stop performing the exercise.

With any exercise you perform only do it so that you feel pressure on the muscles you are focusing on. If you feel pain you should stop immediately. Remember to stretch before and after any exercise program and most of all try to make it fun. Select activities that are enjoyable for you yet challenging. If you have any questions or you would like me to design a program for you that is more tailored to your needs and experience please do not hesitate to email me. My address is meka@sailfit.com.