

Exercise Spotlight: Shoulder Bridge Prep

You may think you know Shoulder Bridge Prep, but Peak Pilates® MI Zoey Trap shows how this whole-body exercise improves articulation from top to bottom!

Shoulder Bridge Prep is a building block version that progresses over time into the full shoulder bridge exercise with beautiful long kicks. This exercise begins the journey building the strength and flexibility that will eventually be called on for Leg Pull Back, Scissors and Bicycle.

This is an exercise that students often *think* they know, and they have possibly done it in fitness or yoga classes. But it needs to be guided toward the correct performance, Pilates style!

This beginning exercise improves articulation of the spine from top to bottom, increases gluteal strength, and promotes proper hip extension. Like all Pilates exercises, it is a whole body exercise that brings awareness of the alignment of the body from top to bottom. It's performed for 3–5 repetitions. Shoulder Bridge Prep proves the old adage: "what starts right is more likely to go right!" So work with the setup of this exercise.

Make sure the feet are set up in a parallel stance, the knees are aligned with the second to third toes, and the thighs are parallel. Working with the legs apart is useful for students

who have low back or sacral issues, are overweight, knock kneed, or have poor balance. At the same time, working with the legs together can help a student connect to the centerline and will challenge their balance.



One question that new teachers often ask is how close the feet should be to the hips. This depends on the student's limb length and flexibility has. As a starting point, set the feet up a little beyond the knees.

Check the placement of the head on the mat so that it is not only centered but that the back of the skull from ear to ear is on the mat with the chin level and the cervical spine in neutral. Shoulders should be relaxed, not forced down to the floor. With the collar bones wide, the arms long with fingers, and the thumbs together, look for the ribs to be soft and wide.

Traditionally, the initiation of the Shoulder Bridge is performed from a strong connection to the gluteal muscles. The hips lift in one strong motion lengthening the torso into one long line. The return to the mat is with an articulation that is ideally bone by bone from top to bottom.

The Shoulder Bridge Prep is simple and easy-to-learn, and it's a great exercise to give as homework for students who need to build gluteal strength and open up the front body!

Problem	Possible Solutions
Thighs falling away from centerline	Place a brick or sponge ball between knees; or bring legs together.

Substituting spinal extension for hip extension/ Under recruiting the hamstrings and gluteals	Use an activating touch to the back of the upper back thigh; use a move into touch on the knee and cue students to lift and lengthen; Cue student to lift from the seat not the back.
Ribs “Popping”	Cue students to broaden the back; relax the front ribs; pull ribs to hips and lengthen long. Initiating properly from the gluteals will help the ribs stay flush.
Elevating shoulders when lifting the hips	Cue students to reach through finger tips as they lift hips; place heavy balls under palms and ask student to push them away as they lift their hips.
Puffing up the chest can go along with shoulder elevation and can really effect breathing especially in heavier or larger chested individuals	Cue students to let chest move away from face; make sure student is not over inhaling on the lift; reverse the breath and cue to lift on an exhale.
Inability or difficulty articulating the spine	Divide the spine in thirds—lower the upper back, mid back, and lower back. Slow down the descent, having the student take a few breaths to come down. Inhale and hold, exhale and sink a little. Elevate the feet on a box or Flexcushion to provide more space for the articulation to occur.