

Women's Health

Get Legs Like a Dancer—In 6 Moves

Pro dancer Akua Noni Parker shares the go-to exercises that keep her lower half stage-ready

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Want to get a major case of leg envy? Just check out a dancer—they always have amazingly sexy stems. But believe it or not, they don't come from dancing alone. "Dancing is great exercise, but it's primarily cardio," says Akua Noni Parker, a professional dancer and member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Company. Parker, who has been dancing since the age of three, has performed on stages around the world. Now, you can catch her (and her awesome legs) in action at New York City's Lincoln Center from June 12-16, where she'll be performing in the acclaimed show *Revelations*, among others.



These six moves, which Parker does daily, will get your legs in show-off shape, too—even if you have two left feet. "These exercises hit major leg muscles like your quads, hamstrings, and calves—but also target your core and glutes and help with hip stabilization," says Karen Joseph, a personal trainer and owner of Fountain of Fitness in Valrico, Florida. Pick a few of your faves and add them to any workout—or do all six exercises as one circuit two or three times a week.

Pelvic raises

Lie down on your back with your knees bent, feet hip-width apart and resting flat on the floor. Then raise your hips so your body forms a straight line from your shoulders to your knees. Pause, then lower back to the starting position. Repeat slowly 30 times. Position your feet a few inches further away from your body and repeat.

Squats

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, and lower your body as far as you can by pushing your hips back and bending your knees (while keeping your knees above your ankles). Pause, then push through your heels to return to start. Do 20 reps, then turn your toes out (as if you're doing a plie) and repeat.

Calf raises

Hold onto a wall with your feet parallel, hip-width apart. Keep your knees straight and rise up onto your toes as high as you can. Pause, then slowly lower back to the floor. Do 15 reps, and then turn your toes out, heels together, and repeat.

Clams

Lie on your left side on the floor, with your hips and knees bent 45 degrees. Your right leg should be on top of your left leg, and your heels should be stacked together. Keeping your feet in contact with each other, raise your right knee as high as you can without moving your pelvis. Pause, then return to the starting position. Don't allow your left leg to move off of the floor.

Single-leg lift

Get on your hands and knees and raise one leg off the ground so it's in line with your body. Your back should be flat, core tight, foot flexed (imagine you're trying to reach your heel toward the wall behind you). This is the starting position. Keeping your leg straight and, without arching your back, squeeze your glute and raise your leg a few inches toward the ceiling. Pause, then lower back to the starting position. Do 10, then repeat on the other side.

Fire hydrant in-out

Start on your hands and knees, then raise your right knee off the ground and bring it toward your chest, keeping your back flat. Keeping your right knee bent, raise your thigh out to the side without moving your hips. Slowly lower back to start. Do 10, then repeat on the other side.