HEELED RAISES AND ROCKING ON A HALF-ROUND

A half-round is a foam column cut in half to create a flat and a round side. Generally these are about 3 feet (1 meter) long. When heel raises are done, the balls of the feet are on the half-round side and the flat side is down. These heel raises are more difficult because greater range of motion is available. When the flat side is up, heel–toe rocking motions are easier. Heel–toe rocking improves ankle flexibility and foot motions for gait. Using a half-round is fun for participants, partly I think, because it is something new. At first they will think, “There’s no way I can do that!” But then they do. This activity requires one-on-one supervision, especially at first.

Benefits

- Strengthens calves while incorporating elements of balance, gait, and flexibility.
- Requires balancing on the balls of feet.
- Adds something new to heel–toe raises and rocking.

Set It Up

Eventually you’ll need enough half-rounds for all participants. (Three-foot [1-meter] half-rounds can be cut in half to make two half-rounds.) But to start, you need only the one because you’ll have to supervise participants closely. Class members can take turns.

How to Do It

The Start

- Demonstrate the movements for the class before having them try it.
- Place the half-round on the floor, flat side down, beside a handrail or behind a sturdy chair. At least one hand should be in contact with balance support at all times.
- Get on the half-round. Stand with legs shoulder-width apart, balls of the feet on the top portion of the half-round. Heels hang off the back.
- Cue participants for good posture. Hips and shoulders should be aligned above the ankles (participants will tend to drop their hips backward; cue them to push the hips forward).

The Moves

Use the following cues.

- Lift the heels so they’re level with the top of the half-round.
- Lift the heels a little higher so they’re above the half-round.
- Try to balance and hold the position a moment.
- Slowly lower the heels below the level of the half-round so that the heels almost touch the ground and you feel your calves stretching.
Are your hips still aligned directly over your ankles? Or did you bend at the hip? Make the needed correction.

Lift and lower the heels for 6 repetitions and then build to doing 12 repetitions, as tolerated.

**Take It Further**

- Increase repetitions until 15 can be done successively.
- Hold the up or the down position longer.

**Give It More Balance**

Have participants do heel–toe rocking on the half-round.

- Turn the half-round over so the flat side is up.
- Carefully help participants get on the half-round.
- Once they are on, cue them for tall posture. No bending at hips, please.
- Commence heel–toe rocking. Drop the heels back and feel that stretch; press the toes forward and down for a heel raise.
- Repeat 6 to 15 times, as tolerated.
- Remind them to keep their hips over their ankles throughout.

**Keep It Safe**

Do these only with your personal supervision at first. Let participants decide for themselves if they want to try this one. Always provide a handrail or the back of a sturdy chair for balance support. If your chair backs are too short for a good support, or if you have tall participants, you can stack two chairs together; just be sure the chairs remain stable.