

THE HERO Gracilis

FIND IT ▶ This thin inner thigh muscle runs from the inside of your groin to your knee.

CLAIM TO FAME

"It helps you bend your knees, and it's one of the few muscles that demonstrates interplay between the knees, pelvis and hips," says Mark Raynsford (markspt.co.uk), posture analyst, running coach and strength trainer. "It keeps your running gait in good alignment, making you burn less energy and become a more efficient runner."

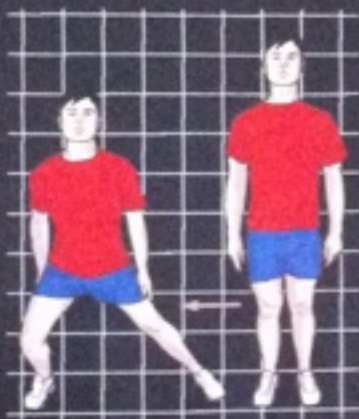
THEY'RE WEAK IF...

... "you feel a sharp pain in your groin when you have to suddenly change direction", explains Raynsford. Yes, even when you weave through the crowd at the train station.

WORSHIP YOUR HIDDEN HERO WITH...

SIDE LUNGES

"This move strengthens one gracilis, stretches the other and reinforces your gluteus medius," explains Raynsford. Stand with your legs together. Take a wide step out to your right and bend your right knee as far as you can. Step back, then repeat on the opposite leg. Do five sets of six reps on each leg twice a week before a run.



THE HERO Obliques

FIND THEM ▶ These are the muscles that flank your six-pack - or belly, depending on the shape you're in.

CLAIM TO FAME

"They help rotate your torso from side to side, but more importantly, they prevent your torso from doing the very same action on the run," says Raynsford. "A torso that does the hula while you run can destabilise your pelvis, meaning you'll fatigue quicker, cover less distance and place stress on your lower back and knees."

THEY'RE WEAK IF...

... "you slump forward when you run, or even while you sit in your car or watch telly", says Raynsford.

WORSHIP YOUR HIDDEN HERO WITH...

MEDICINE BALL ROTATIONS

Sit with your knees bent and hold a medicine ball in front of you. Twist to your left, keeping your head and upper body facing forward. Pull the ball across the front of your body to the right, then pull back to the left again. Do three sets of this drill for one minute, one to three times a week, and you'll run strong mile after mile. 