THE CLOCK

The exercise begins as you imagine you are the centre of a clock.

Technical points:

Begin by aligning the body – feet hips width apart, outside of the feet pointing forwards, toes slightly inwards, knees soft, tail bone slightly tucked in, ears aligned with the shoulders aligned with the hips aligned with the ankles. Elongate the spine and relax your shoulders, arms and hands.

Imagine you are the centre of a clock. Distribute your bodyweight evenly on both feet.

Transfer your bodyweight on the right foot. Bend your right leg slightly and ensure the tripod is rooted into the ground. Activate your abdominal muscles and tense the right buttock so the right side of the hip doesn't push out to the side, going out of alignment, and both sides of the hip are levelled. Keep elongating the body and looking forwards while the nose, solar plexus and belly button are connected by a straight line, stacked on top of each other (i.e. do not lean back, forward or to the side).

We will call this The Crane position, you can see it in *Fig 69: The Clock* 1st and 3rd picture.

Imagining you are the centre of a clock gently stretch your left leg out and tap the ground with your toes at 12 o'clock in front of you. Do so without placing any weight at all on your left foot, you just tap the ground and slowly pull the foot back, 100% of the weight is on your right foot all the time.



[Fig 69: The Clock]

Reach as far as you can without changing your alignment, your tripod, bodyweight distribution or losing balance. The only part of your body that moves is the left leg. You can also bend your support

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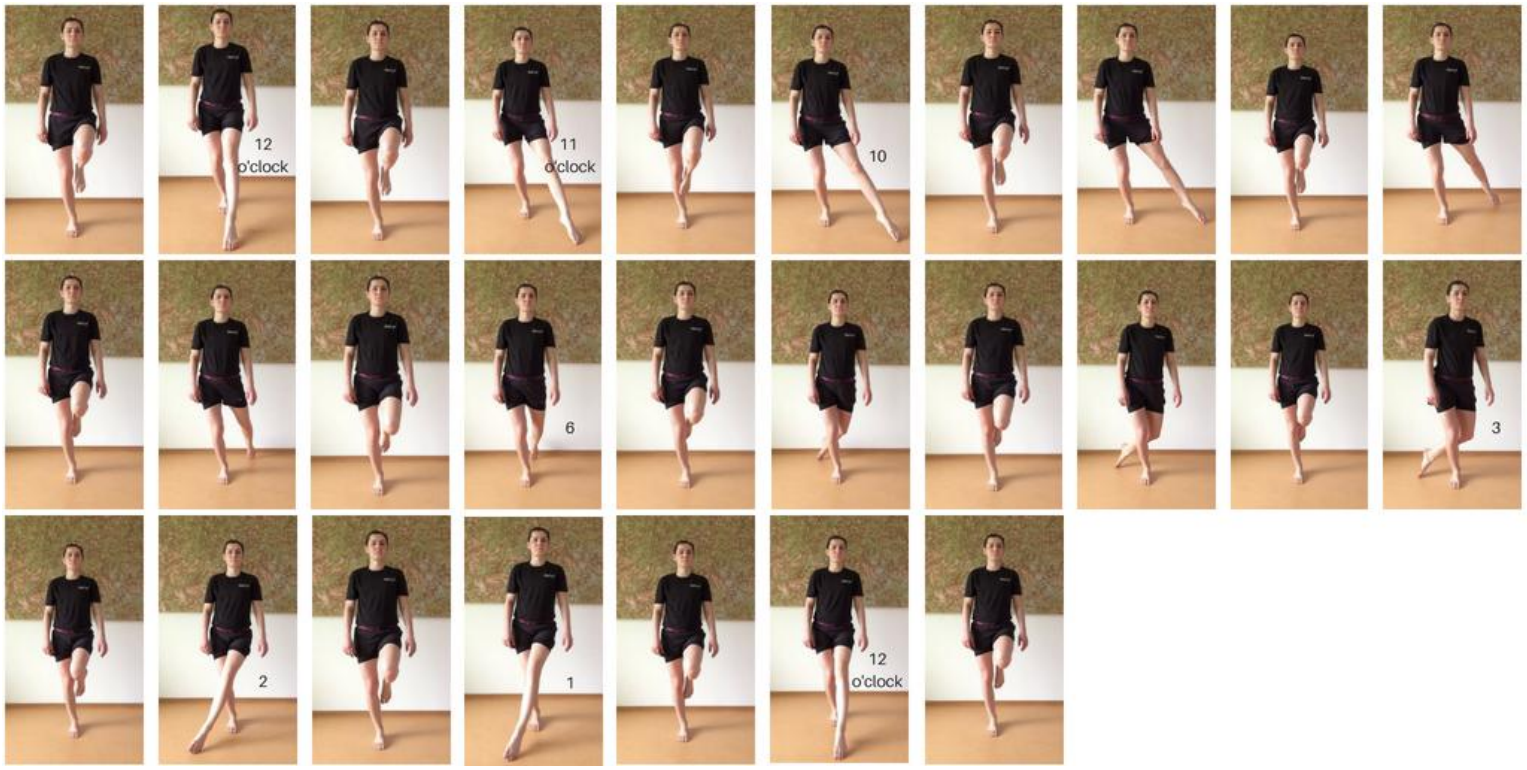
leg as if doing a small pistol squat. However pay special care not to transfer your bodyweight off the tripod and on the balls of your feet or toes, keep the heel rooted into the ground.

The movement is slow, controlled and fluid. The slower you move the better. If you balance on the right leg, continue by tapping, counter clockwise, tapping at 11 o'clock, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3 (behind your right leg). For 2, 1 and back to 12 you tap in front of the right leg. After each tap go back to The Crane then reach out for the next number.

Fig 70: The Clock shows the whole clock when balancing on the right leg.



[Fig 70: The Clock]

When you balance on your left leg you go clockwise, 12, 1, 2, 3.....9 (behind the left leg, as you did on number 3 in Fig 70), 10, 11 and 12 in front of the left leg.

Repeat both sides

Breathe normally throughout the exercise, while relaxing your shoulders, arms and hands. Ensure your hips are aligned. It is essential that the hip doesn't go out of alignment. Performing this exercise correctly will strengthen the stability muscles and will prevent joints from going out of alignment and reduce the risk of early wear and tear. This is especially important for runners.

Benefits:

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Strengthening feet, ankles, knees and hip stability muscles.

Strengthening quads, adductors and abductors, glutes which it turn stabilise the hip and knee.

Improving balance, posture and postural awareness and focus.

Strengthening core muscles and spine stability muscles.

Reducing the risk of injuries such as ankle sprains or knee pain by strengthening and mobilising.

Speeding up recovery from injury.

Common errors and/or weaknesses to be aware of:

- Transferring body weight on the balls of the feet. The heel should be nailed into the ground and stable throughout.

- Leaning back, forward or to the side when reaching out around the clock. Keep alignment or think about re-aligning nose-solar plexus-belly button. (see *Fig 71: The Clock*)

- Hip goes out of alignment, pushing towards the outside. In this case the nose–solar plexus–belly button are not on top of each other anymore. Tuck in or tense the buttock on the corresponding side to bring everything back in alignment. (see *Fig 71: The Clock*)

- Support knee buckling/dropping in. Knee should track the toes as much as possible (see *Fig 71: The Clock*)

- Toes turn and point outside. This can lead to overpronation of the foot and the knee buckling in, followed by the hip. The outside of the foot should point forward and the toes slightly to the inside. (see *Fig 71: The Clock*)

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[Fig 71: The Clock]

Progression:

Perform The Clock on a log, a stump, changing surfaces, using a Bosu Ball or a balance board.

Notes:

Depending on the fitness level you can go around the clock and back.
However when technique is lost change legs and then come back and resume where you left off.

Another option is to go around a quarter of the clock or half with a very correct technique and keep changing legs. I.e: balance on the left leg for a quarter, balance on the right leg for a quarter, balance on the left leg for another quarter, balance on the right leg for another quarter and so on.

This exercise is about how slow and controlled you can move, not about how much you can do or how far you can stretch. You have to judge when it is time to stop, take a break or change legs. The priority is to keep the form. In order of importance:

1. Keep the form
2. Move very slow
3. Reach far
4. Keep going for a longer time

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