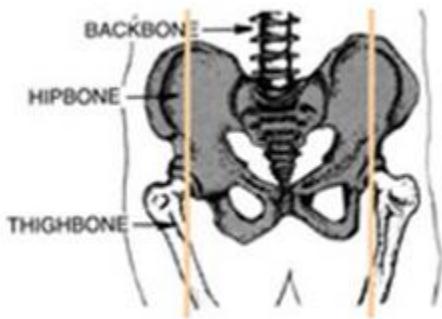


Leg Position - "Hip Distance Apart"



In this article, we investigate the most basic alignment for the legs: parallel, and hip distance apart. This is a fundamental position in good posture and in many exercises. In fitness classes, Pilates and other, you will hear this position asked for in sitting, lying, and standing exercises. When instructors say, "legs parallel and hip distance apart," what they want is a good line from the hip, all the way through the knee, ankle, and foot. What often happens is the opposite. People display a variety of interpretations of "hip distance apart," and apply "parallel" to some parts and not others. Let's break this position down so that you will know exactly how to align your legs. Parallel is easy. We want the legs side by side with the knees and toes pointing forward. Often, people will have their legs straight, but the feet off in different directions, so watch out for that. The feet should be parallel so that we train our muscles to stand and walk properly. Hip distance apart is a little tricky. People often interpret that as the width of the flesh of their hips, which means they go too wide. What we really want is a leg alignment that comes straight out of the middle of the hip joint, and the hip joint is much closer to the midline of the body than most of us realize. A look at figure 1 shows that the hip joint is deep inside the body -- inside the crest of the hip bone.

This exercise will help you find the parallel, hip distance apart, alignment for your legs:

1. Stand with your feet directly under you, a few inches apart. Toes and knees point forward.
2. Feel the bony part of your hip bone that sticks out in front with your hands. Move an inch or two inside of that (this will depend a little on how much your hip bones flare open) and draw a straight line from there down through your knee, ankle, and foot.
3. Refine this position by shifting your weight slightly forward and back and side to side. Adjust your feet until you feel a place where the legs feel balanced, and you have a sense that your weight is falling directly down through your legs into the floor. When you get it, it feels "right." Your feet will not be touching, nor will you have a stance as wide as the flesh of your hips. Now you know, "parallel, hip distance apart." This is an excellent place to start finding your leg alignment for exercise, and good posture in general. It is your basic, neutral position. From there, you might take a wider stance that will give you a broader base of support for certain kinds of exercise, or you might go narrower, as we often do in Pilates. But neutral is the place to come back to.