

Who Should Stretch

Everyone can learn to stretch, regardless of age or flexibility. You don't need to be in top physical condition.

When to Stretch

Stretching can be done anytime you feel like it: at work, at your desk, in a car, waiting for a bus, under a nice shady tree after a hike, or at the beach. Stretch before and after physical activity, but also stretch at various times of the day when you can.

Why Stretch?

Stretching relaxes your mind and tunes up your body, should be part of your daily life.

Regular stretching will do the following things:

- Reduce muscle tension and make the body feel more relaxed.
- Promote circulation.
- Help coordination by allowing for freer and easier movement.

Stretches

Hold each stretch for about 10-12 seconds, doing each stretch 2-3 times.

Never bounce your muscles on your stretches. Only a steady constant resistance.

Remember: you should never feel pain when stretching, just a minor tightness feeling.

Improve your flexibility with a good stretching program

Stretching is a fundamental way to improve your overall health and fitness. By incorporating a regular flexibility program into your exercise routine you will:

- decrease pain and soreness after exercise
- improve circulation
- improve range of motion
- improve posture
- decrease muscle tension
- reduce muscle soreness
- improve your ability to relax
- allow time for mental training, such as visualization

A complete stretching routine can take as little as 10 minutes. The best time to stretch is after you have warmed up and the muscles are warm. The best time to perform your flexibility routine is after exercise. This is when the muscle is the warmest and when you can use the relaxation. Focus on stretching the muscles you use the most during your specific exercise or sport

Proper Stretching Technique

- Perform balanced stretching. This means you should always stretch the muscles on both sides of your body evenly. Don't stretch one side more than the other side.
- Avoid over-stretching. Never stretch to the point of pain or discomfort. You will feel slight/mild tension or a pull on the muscle at the peak of the stretch. Back off if the stretch feels painful

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BASIC STRETCHES

- Go slow! Always stretch slowly and evenly. Hold the stretch for about fifteen seconds and release slowly as well.
- Never bounce or jerk while stretching. This can cause injury as a muscle is pushed beyond it's ability. All stretches should be smooth, and slow.
- Don't forget to breathe. Flexibility exercises should be relaxing. Deep easy, even breathing is key to relaxation. Never hold your breath while you stretch.
- Try to stretch a little further with each stretch. Again, only to the point of mild tension.

Recommended Stretches

Hamstrings: Sit on the floor with one leg straight in front of you and the other leg bent (with the sole of the foot touching the inside thigh of the outstretched leg). Keep your back straight and lean forward from the hips. Slide your arms forward toward your outstretched foot. Stop when you feel a pull in the hamstring. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat with the other leg extended.

Hips: Lie on your back. Bend your left leg and bring it toward you. Grasp your left knee gently with your right hand and pull it slightly down and to the right until you feel a stretch. Turn your head to the left. Your right leg should stay flat on the floor. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat with the other leg.

Low back: Lay flat on the floor with knees bent. Use your hands to pull them toward your chest. Lift your head and shoulders off the floor until your head is approximately six inches from your knees. Cross your ankles. Gently rock yourself back and forth in this position for 30 seconds.

Quadriceps: Lie on your right side with your right knee bent at a 90-degree angle. Bend your left leg and hold onto the ankle with your left hand. Gently pull your left heel in toward the left side of your butt. As soon as you feel a stretch in your left quad, slowly lower your left knee toward the floor behind your right knee. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat with the other leg.

Calves: Stand an arm's length away from a wall with your feet shoulder-width apart. Slide the left foot back approximately 18 inches, keeping the knee straight and both heels flat on the floor. Bend your right knee and slowly move your pelvis forward until you feel a stretch in the calf and Achilles of the left leg. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat with the other leg.

WARM-UPS, consisting of stretching and flexibility exercises should be performed for a minimum of 5-7 minutes before aerobic exercise. The purpose of warm-ups includes: keeping muscles supple, increasing range of motion of joints, enhancing flexibility, improving coordination, increasing body temperature and heart rate, increasing blood flow to muscles and preventing injuries.

COOL-DOWNS, consisting of slow walking and stretching, are performed after aerobic exercise for duration of 5-7 minutes. The purpose of cool-downs is to gradually return your heart rate and blood pressure to resting or pre-exercise levels.

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BASIC STRETCHES

STRETCHING EXERCISES

Stretches for side of neck:

1. Sit or stand with arms hanging loosely at sides
2. Turn head to one side, then the other
3. Hold for 5 seconds, each side
4. Repeat 1 to 3 times



Stretches side of neck

1. Sit or stand with arms hanging loosely at sides
2. Tilt head sideways, first one side then the other
3. Hold for 5 seconds
4. Repeat 1-3 times



Stretches back of neck

1. Sit or stand with arms hanging loosely at sides
2. Gently tilt head forward to stretch back of neck
3. Hold 5 seconds
4. Repeat 1-3 times

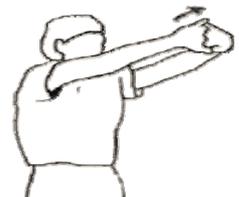
Stretches side of shoulder and back of upper arm

1. Stand or sit and place right hand on left shoulder
2. With left hand, pull right elbow across chest toward left shoulder and hold 10 to 15 seconds
3. Repeat on other side



Stretches shoulder, middle back, arms, hands, fingers, wrist

1. Interlace fingers and turn palms out
2. Extend arms in front at shoulder height
3. Hold 10 to 20 seconds, relax, and repeat



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BASIC STRETCHES

Stretches triceps, top of shoulders, waist

1. Keep knees slightly flexed>
2. Stand or sit with arms overhead
3. Hold elbow with hand of opposite arm
4. Pull elbow behind head gently as you slowly lean to side until mild stretch is felt
5. Hold 10 to 15 sec
6. Repeat on other side



Stretches middle back

1. Stand with hands on hips
2. Gently twist torso at waist until stretch is felt
3. Hold 10 to 15 sec
4. Repeat on other side
5. Keep knees slightly flexed



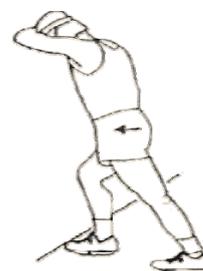
Stretches ankles

1. Stand and hold onto something for balance
2. Lift right foot and rotate foot and ankle 8 to 10 times clockwise, then 8 to 10 times counter clockwise.
3. Repeat on other side (Note: can also be done sitting)



Stretches calf

1. Stand a little way from wall and lean on it with forearms, head resting on hands
2. Place right foot in front of you, leg bent, left leg straight behind you
3. Slowly move hips forward until you feel stretch in calf of left leg
4. Keep left heel flat and toes pointed straight ahead
5. Hold easy stretch 10 to 20 seconds
6. Do not bounce
7. Repeat on other side
8. Do not hold breath



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BASIC STRETCHES

Stretches front on thigh (quadriceps)

1. Stand a little a way from wall and place left hand on wall for support
2. Standing straight, grasp top of left foot with right hand
3. Pull heel toward buttock
4. hold 10 to 20 sec
5. Repeat on other side



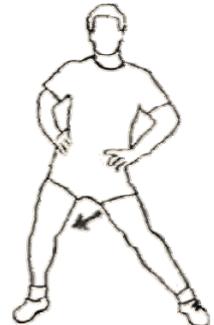
Relaxes hamstrings, stretches calves, achilles, and ankles

1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart
2. Keep heels flat, toes pointed straight ahead
3. Assume bent knee position (quarter squat)
4. Hold 30 sec



Stretches inner thigh, groin

1. Stand with feet pointed straight ahead, a little more than shoulder-width apart
2. Bend right knee slightly and move left hip downward toward right knee
3. Hold 10 to 15 seconds
4. Repeat on other side
5. If necessary, hold on to something (chair, etc.) for balance



Stretches side of hip, hamstrings

1. Sit on floor with right leg straight out in front
2. Bend left leg, cross left foot over, place outside right knee
3. Pull left knee across body toward opposite shoulder
4. Hold 10 to 20 seconds
5. Repeat on other side
6. Breathe easily



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BASIC STRETCHES

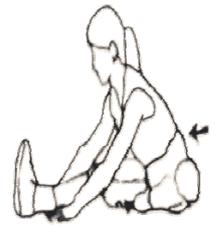
Stretches lower back, side of hip, and neck

1. Sit on floor with left leg straight out in front
2. Bend right leg, cross right foot over, place outside left knee
3. Bend left elbow and rest it outside right knee
4. Place right hand behind hips on floor
5. Turn head over right shoulder, rotate upper body right
6. Hold 10 to 15 seconds
7. Repeat on other side
8. Breathe in slowly



Stretches back of leg and lower back

1. Sit on floor, legs straight out at sides
2. Bend left leg in at knee
3. Slowly bend forward from hips toward foot of straight leg until you feel slight stretch
4. Do not dip head forward at start of stretch
5. Hold this developmental stretch 10 to 20 seconds
6. Repeat on other side
7. Foot of straight leg upright, ankles and toes relaxed
8. Use a towel if you cannot easily reach your feet



Stretches shoulders, arms, hands, feet and ankles

1. Lie on floor, extend arms overhead, keep legs straight
2. Reach arms and legs in opposite directions
3. Stretch 5 sec, relax

