
Flexibility and Stretching

Stretching before exercise prepares the joints for motion, helps avoid injury and increases the range of motion of the area being stretched. After exercise stretching reduces soreness, helps to prevent muscle cramping and increases the range of motion.

- Talk with your doctor if you are unsure about a particular exercise. For example, if you've had hip or back surgery, talk with your doctor before doing lower-body exercises.
- Always warm up before stretching exercises. Stretch after endurance or strength exercises. If you are doing only stretching exercises, warm up with a few minutes of easy walking first. Stretching your muscles before they are warmed up may result in injury.
- Always remember to breathe normally while holding a stretch.
- Stretching may feel slightly uncomfortable; for example, a mild pulling feeling is normal.
- You are stretching too far if you feel sharp or stabbing pain, or joint pain — while doing the stretch or even the next day. Reduce the stretch so that it doesn't hurt.
- Never “bounce” into a stretch. Make slow, steady movements instead. Jerking into position can cause muscles to tighten, possibly causing injury.
- Avoid “locking” your joints. Straighten your arms and legs when you stretch them, but don't hold them tightly in a straight position. Your joints should always be slightly bent while stretching.

When stretching it is important to remember to stretch until you feel a slight tension and hold for 10-20 seconds. Do NOT bounce. Never stretch until it hurts and stay relaxed throughout the stretch.

Below are examples of some stretching exercises

1) Stretches for side of neck

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



2) Stretches for side of neck

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



3) Stretches back of neck

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



4) Stretches side of shoulder and back of upper arm

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



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

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



6) Stretches triceps, top of shoulders, waist

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



Referenced from: www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide and www.womensheart.org

7) Stretches middle back

- Stand with hands on hips
- Gently twist torso at waist until stretch is felt
- Hold 10 to 15 sec
- Repeat on other side
- Keep knees slightly flexed



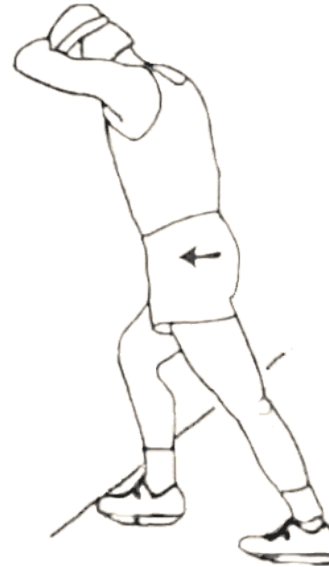
8) Stretches ankles

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



9) Stretches calf

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



10) Stretches front on thigh (quadriceps)

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



11) Relaxes hamstrings, stretches calves, achilles, and ankles

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



12) Stretches inner thigh, groin

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



13) Stretches side of hip, hamstrings

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



14) Stretches inner thigh, groin

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



15) Stretches back of leg and lower back

- Sit on floor, legs straight out at sides
- Bend left leg in at knee
- Slowly bend forward from hips toward foot of straight leg until you feel slight stretch
- Do no dip head forward at start of stretch
- Hold this developmental stretch 10 to 20 seconds
- Repeat on other side
- Foot of straight leg upright, ankles and toes relaxed
- Use a towel if you cannot easily reach your feet



16) Stretches shoulders, arms, hands, feet and ankles

- Lie on floor, extend arms overhead, keep legs straight
- Reach arms and legs in opposite directions
- Stretch 5 sec, relax

