

# **Stretching Exercises** for a **Healthy Lifestyle**

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Provided by:

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Stretching is one of the best ways to avoid muscle soreness and cramps and prevent hurting yourself. Stretching also helps you be more flexible and feel relaxed.

## **HOW TO STRETCH:**

- Do a short warm-up *before* stretching (e.g., walk around).
- Move slowly until you feel the muscle stretch. A safe stretch is gentle and relaxing.
- Hold the stretch steady for 15 to 30 seconds.
- Relax.
- Repeat as instructed in each stretch.

## **IMPORTANT:**

- \* Do NOT bounce when stretching your muscles.
- \* Stretch within your own limits. Don't compete with others.
- \* Breathe slowly in and out. Do NOT hold your breath.
- \* **Never stretch if you have pain before you begin. If a stretch causes pain, stop doing it.**  
*Listen to your body!*

# NECK



Start by tipping your head to the right. Place your right hand on your head and apply a slight bit of pressure to further stretch your neck to the right. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

Repeat this on your left side by tipping your head to the left and place your left hand on your head, applying a slight bit of pressure to further stretch your neck to the left. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds.



Turn your head to the right side. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Return your head to the center position. Then turn your head to the left side and hold for 15 to 30 seconds.

# SHOULDERS



Using your left hand, pull your right arm across the front of your body and hold your right arm at the elbow as it lays across your chest. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds then switch arms.

Now using your right hand, pull your left arm across the front of your body. Hold your left arm at the elbow as it lays across your chest. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds.



Behind your back, grip your right wrist with your left hand. Lift your arms as high as you can without bending your body forward. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Then release and relax your arms.

Now repeat this same stretch, only this time grip your left wrist with your right hand. Lift your arms as high as you can without bending your body forward. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then release.



Grip a towel behind your back by reaching with your left hand behind your left shoulder and by reaching the towel with your right arm at your lower back. Alternate pulling the towel up with your left arm and pull down with your right arm. Repeat this 3 to 5 times.

Switch your arms so that your right arm grabs the towel over your right shoulder and your left arm grabs the towel near your lower back. Pull the towel up with your right arm and pull down with your left arm. Repeat 3 to 5 times on this side.

## BICEPS



Extend your arms in front of you with your palms facing up. Using your left hand, pull back on the fingers of your right hand until your fingers are pointing down. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then switch arms.

Using your right hand, pull back on the fingers of your left hand until your fingers are pointing down. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds on this side.

## TRICEPS



Reach both arms up over your head. Then bend your right arm so that your right hand touches the space between your shoulder blades (just at the base of your neck). Use your left hand to pull slightly on your right elbow. Hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Release your arms then switch sides.

Now bend your left arm so that your left hand touches the space between your shoulder blades (just at the base of your neck). Use your right hand to pull slightly on your left elbow. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

## OBLIQUES (SIDE BODY)



Start by standing straight and tall. Reach your left arm over your head and bend at your side to the right while sliding your right arm down the side of your leg. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then return to standing straight. Repeat on the other side.

Reach your right arm over your head and bend at your side to the left while sliding your left arm down the side of your leg. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then return to standing up straight.

Be careful to lean at your side and do not bend your body over to the front or lean too far back.

## CHEST



First find a corner of a wall. Bend your left elbow to a 90 degree angle and place it against the wall so that your elbow is about the height of your left shoulder. With your arm pushing against the wall, take a small lunge forward past the wall and then twist your body slightly to the right. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Then step back and return your arms to your side.

Use the other side of the corner to now stretch the right side of your chest. Bend your right elbow to a 90 degree angle and place it against the corner of the wall so that your elbow is about the height of your right shoulder. With your arm pushing against the wall, take a small lunge forward past the wall and then twist your body slightly to the left. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Then step back and return your arms to your side.

# BACK



First, get on your hands and knees, making sure that your back is flat. Then arch your back up like a cat. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds.

Return your back to the neutral position, with your back flat, just like when you first got on your hands and knees.

Now let your back sag. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds.

Repeat this sequence 3 to 5 times. This should be a gentle movement and NOT cause any pain in the lower back.



Laying flat on the ground, pull your knees to your chest and hug them. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds and then release. Repeat this as many times as needed.



Sit on the edge of a sturdy chair with your knees shoulder-width apart. Bend over so that your chest just rests on the tops of your thighs. Now arch your back so that your shoulders roll forward and your arms dangle to the floor.

Return your back to neutral so that your chest just rests on the tops of your thighs.

Repeat this sequence 3 to 5 times.

# QUADRICEPS



For this next exercise, use a wall, sturdy chair, or countertop for balance. Bend your right leg so that your foot is near your bottom and grab your right foot with your right hand. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then release.

Switch sides. Now bend your left leg so that your foot is near your bottom and grab your left foot with your left hand. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then release.

Make sure you keep your legs together and do not bend over forward when you are doing this stretch. If you cannot grab your foot easily place a towel around your ankle so that you can still lift up on your foot. Remember to hold on to the wall, a sturdy chair, or a countertop for balance.

**If you find it difficult to do the stretch above, try out this one below:**



Lay on the floor on your left side with your legs stacked on top of each other. Bend your right leg so that your foot is near your bottom and grab your right foot with your right hand. Hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds then release. Switch sides.

Bend your left leg so that your foot is near your bottom and grab your left foot with your left hand. Hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds then release.

Be careful that you do not sit back or bend at the waist. To help maintain a straight line with your body push your hips forward. Remember, if you cannot grab your foot easily, place a towel around your ankle so that you can still pull on that foot and get a good stretch.

# HAMSTRINGS



Find a sturdy chair or a table that is about the height of your hips. Stretch out your right leg and place it on the back of the chair or across a table. Be careful that you do not lock your knee. Stretch your right arm towards your toes and hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Switch legs.

Stretch out your left leg and place it on the back of the chair or across a table. Stretch your left arm towards your toes and hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

If you cannot reach your toes, reach only as far as you can. Be careful not to bounce or arch your back.

**If you find it difficult to do the stretch above, try out this one below:**



For this exercise you will need a towel. Lay flat on the floor and then bend your knees. Place the towel around the bottom of your right foot, extend your right leg, and pull it back towards your head. Be careful that you don't lock your right knee and that your left foot does not lift off the ground. Hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds and then release your right leg back to the ground. Switch legs.

Bend your right knee, place the towel around the bottom of your left foot, extend your left leg, and pull it back towards your head. Hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds and then release your left leg back to the ground.

## GLUTES



Lay flat on the floor and then bend your knees so that your feet are flat on the floor. Then cross your left foot over your right knee so that you are resting your left ankle on your right knee. Using both hands, pull back on your right leg. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then release your legs and place both feet back on the floor, (your knees are bent). Switch sides.

Cross your right foot over your left knee so that you are resting your right ankle on your left knee. Using both hands, pull back on your left leg. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then release your legs and place both feet back on the floor (your knees are bent).

## CALVES



Place your palms against the wall so that your arms are relatively straight. Step back with your right leg and bend your left knee to about a 90 degree angle. Push your right heel so that it touches the floor and push your hips forward so that you feel the stretch in the back of your lower right leg. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then release and switch legs.

Step back with your left leg and bend your right knee to about a 90 degree angle. Push your left heel so that it touches the floor and push your hips forward so that you feel the stretch in the back of your lower left leg. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then release.