

Stretching

"Stretching" describes exercises which lengthen muscles and are aimed directly at extending the range of movement (ROM) of a joint or muscle. Technically, the muscles are relaxing.

Flexibility, or stretching exercises must be performed statically and progressively and only after the body has been warmed up.

The aims of stretching are:

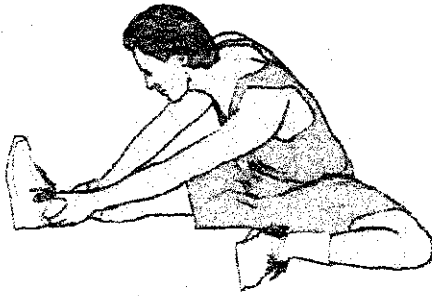
- Reduce muscle tension and make the body feel more relaxed
- Increase the ROM of joints and muscles so that the body can work more efficiently
- Help prevent muscle soreness and tears
- Help facilitate recovery from soft tissue injuries
- Improve technique by extending the range of body movement
- Lengthen the muscle again after use.

How To Do It

- Only stretch after muscles are warm
- Ease into the stretch to the point where it is comfortable but not painful. This is slow, static stretching.
- Stretch so that the pull is felt in the bulky central part of the muscle. Concentrate on relaxing the muscle or muscle groups being stretched.
- Never bounce to increase the ROM at a joint
- Breathe calmly and rhythmically
- Relate stretches directly to the aerobic or endurance components of your workout.
- Stretch daily for gains in flexibility to be achieved
- Trying too hard can result in injury—do not compete.
- Alternate stretching exercises from one muscle group to another.
- If you are exceptionally flexible, take care not to over-stretch as there is a danger of injury through dislocation.
- Develop your stretches by taking the initial stretch for 8—10 seconds and then develop the stretch further as the tension within the muscle eases.
- Work slowly and with care



Hamstring stretch



Your hamstring muscle runs along the back of your upper leg.

Sit on the floor with your right leg extended out straight, the knee slightly bent, and the toes pointing toward you.

Bend your left leg so that your left foot is next to the inside of your right thigh.

Lean forward from the hips, and reach for your right ankle. Do not try to touch your forehead to your knee.

Switch legs.

To isolate your hamstring muscle without placing stress on your back and neck, lie on the floor near the outer corner of a wall or a door frame. Rest your left heel against the wall, with your left knee slightly bent. Gently straighten your left leg until you feel a stretch along the back of your left thigh. As your flexibility increases, gradually scoot yourself closer to the wall or door frame to maximize the stretch. Hold the stretch for 30 to 60 seconds. Switch legs and repeat.



Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, one foot extended half a step forward.

Keeping the front leg straight, bend your rear leg, resting both hands on the bent thigh.

Slowly exhale, aiming to tilt both buttocks upward, keeping the front leg straight, and both feet flat on the floor, pointing forward.

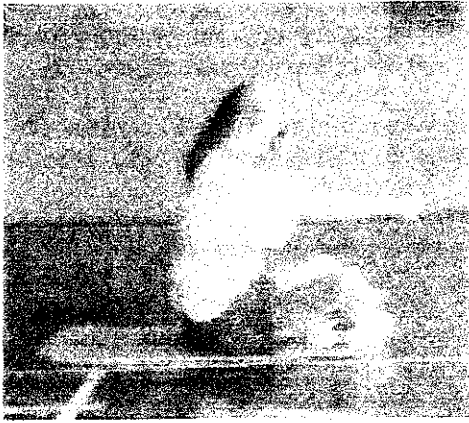
Inhale slowly, and relax from the stretch. Repeat the stretch again, this time beginning with the toes of the front foot raised toward the ceiling, but keeping the heel on the floor.

Quadriceps stretch



Standing near a wall or a piece of sturdy exercise equipment for support, grasp your ankle and gently pull your heel up and back until you feel a stretch in the front of your thigh. This will stretch your quadriceps muscle, which runs along the front of your thigh. Tighten your stomach muscles to prevent your stomach from sagging outward, and keep your knees close together. Hold the stretch for 30 to 60 seconds. Switch legs and repeat.

N.B. don't look around like the girl in the picture.



Trapezium Stretch

From a sitting position, inter-link the hands in front of the body and reach out until you can feel the stretch across the upper back

Upward Stretch

Extend both hands straight above your head, palms touching.

Inhale, slowly pushing your hands upward, then backward, keeping your back straight.

Exhale and relaxing from the stretch before you repeat.



Neck stretch

To stretch the left side of your neck, bend your head forward and slightly to the right. With your right hand, gently pull your head downward. You'll feel a nice, easy stretch along the back left side of your neck.

Don't tug too hard. Remember, you want to hold a comfortable — not painful — stretch.

Hold the stretch for 30 to 60 seconds.

Repeat on the opposite side.



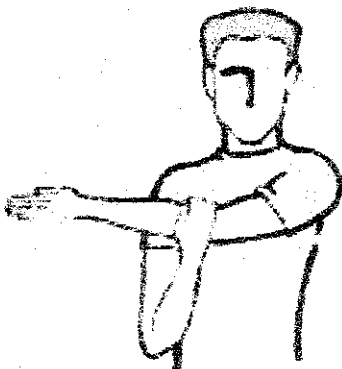
Shoulder stretch

If the back of your shoulder is tight, you may be more likely to develop rotator cuff problems.

To keep your shoulder flexible, bring your left arm across your body and hold it with your right arm, either above or below the elbow but not on the joint.

Hold the stretch for 30 to 60 seconds.

Switch arms and repeat.





Back—Spine curve

Begin the stretch by laying on your front, with your hands close to your chest, fingers pointing upward.

Exhale, pushing yourself up with your arms and contracting your buttocks while keeping both feet firmly on the floor.

Look up toward the ceiling, to also feel the stretch in your neck.



Lower Back-Cat Stretch

Adopt a position on all fours, point your fingers forward and your toes behind.

Start with a flat back, and then drop your head downward, pushing your shoulder blades upward and outward as you elevate your upper back.



Glutes and back— Foetal Position

Lie on your back, keeping your head on the floor.

Slowly pull both legs into your chest, and secure them there by wrapping your arms around the back of your knees.

Exhale, pulling down on your legs while gradually lifting your buttocks off the floor.

You can stretch your neck, once in this position, by slowly tilting your chin to your chest.



Obliques—Leg Over

Lie on your back, extending your left arm out to the side, while taking your left leg over your right, bringing the knee inline with the hips.

Keeping your right leg straight, use your right arm to push down on the knee of the left leg, exhaling slowly as you stretch.

Switch sides and repeat.

Easy Calf Raise Down

Your calf muscle runs along the back of your lower leg.

Stand on a raised platform, on the balls of your feet, holding onto a secure object for balance.

Exhale, slowly dropping your heels down towards the floor and allowing your toes to raise naturally.

This movement can be performed using either one or both feet.

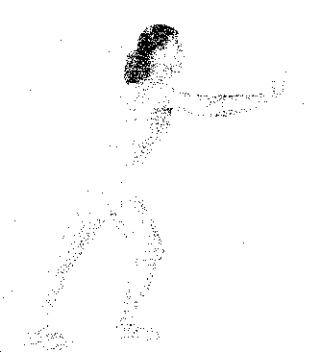


Basic Calf stretch

To stretch your calf muscle, stand at arm's length from a wall or a piece of sturdy exercise equipment. Place your right foot behind your left foot. Keep your right knee straight and your right heel on the floor as you slowly bend your left leg forward. Your back should be straight and your hips forward. Don't rotate your feet inward or outward.

Hold the stretch for 30 to 60 seconds. To deepen the stretch, slightly bend your right knee as you bend your left leg forward.

Switch legs and repeat.



Hip flexor stretch

Your hip flexor — which allows you to lift your knees and bend at the waist — is located on your upper thigh, just below your hipbone.

Kneel on both knees.

Step forward with your right foot while keeping your left knee on the floor. Put your hands on top of your right thigh.

Slide your back leg behind you until you feel the stretch in the front of the hip. To intensify the stretch, push your hip forward, straighten your body, and put your hands on your front knee. Hold for 10-12 seconds and then change sides.



Side Lunge

Stand upright, with both feet facing forward, double shoulder-width apart.

Place your hands on your hips, in order to keep your back straight, slowly exhale, taking your bodyweight across to one side.

Avoid leaning forward, or taking the knee of the bent leg over your toes. As you increase the stretch, the foot of the bent leg should point slightly outward.

To increase the stretch, relax upward, slowly sliding your feet out a few inches to the sides.





Bicep-Wall Stretch

Place the palm, inner elbow, and shoulder of one arm against the wall.

Keeping the arm in contact with the wall, exhale and slowly turn your body around, to feel the stretch in your biceps and pectoral muscles.

Adjust the hand position either higher or lower and repeat to stretch the multiple biceps and chest muscles.



Biceps — One Arm Against the Wall

Place your forearm and biceps against a wall, keeping the arm at right angles.

Exhale, slowly turning your opposite shoulder backward, keeping the other arm firmly in contact with the wall.

Repeat this stretch both raising and lowering the walled arm, in order to work the different pectoral muscles.



Pecs — with or without the towel

Bring towel behind the back and grasp with both hands. Lift away from body without leaning the upper body forward.



Iliotibial band (ITB) stretch

The iliotibial band (ITB) is a band of tissue that runs along the outside of your hip, thigh and knee. A tight ITB may cause pain in the outer knee or hip.

To stretch your ITB, stand near a wall or a piece of sturdy exercise equipment for support. Cross your left leg over your right leg at the ankle. Extend your left arm overhead, reaching toward your right side. You'll feel this stretch along your left hip.

Hold the stretch for 30 to 60 seconds. Switch sides and repeat.

Shoulders/Back Flexibility Circuit

1. Cobra over Stretch, using bench.



2. Reverse shoulder stretch.



3. Feet to head stretch.



4. Over stretch against wall.



5. Ropes, over head and return.



6. Kneel arch back stretch.



7. Full bridge stretch.



8. Walk hands down to bridge and back up, using wall bars.

