

Getting started with flexibility and stretching

Flexibility is the ability to move joints and muscles through their full range of motion. As you become more flexible, you will find it easier to reach things on high shelves, to look under a bed, or perhaps to tie your shoes. You will also have a better sense of balance and coordination.

To stay flexible, stretch all your major muscle groups, including your arms, back, hips, front and back of your thighs, and calves or engage in activities that include stretching, such as dance, martial arts (aikido or karate), tai chi, or yoga.

A big part of beginning a physical activity program is getting used to the feel of using your muscles, and flexibility can be a great place to start. Just as with other kinds of physical activity, it's best to start slowly and increase your efforts gradually.

Tips for stretching

- **Warm your muscles** before stretching them by walking or doing some other light aerobic exercise for 5-10 minutes.
- **Stretch 10 -12 minutes each day.**
- **Ease yourself into the stretch** and hold for 10 – 30 seconds. Avoid pushing or bouncing. You should feel a gentle tension in the muscle but NOT pain.
- **Exhale as you do the stretch.** While you are holding the stretch, inhale deeply.
- **Close your eyes** while stretching. It helps you relax and reduces self-consciousness and the urge to compete.
- **Take a moment to enjoy** the good, warm feeling that comes after a good stretch. Do some stretches first thing in the morning, take a stretch break instead of a coffee break, or stretch in the office for a few minutes.

Try These...

Latissimus (back) stretch



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1. Stand with your back straight and your feet shoulder-width apart. You can do this stretch sitting down if you are not steady on your feet.
2. Hold your arms above your head, and hold one hand with the other, OR place one hand on your waist for support and reach with the other, Hold and then switch sides.
3. Pull upward while leaning straight over toward your right side. Keep your lower body straight. You should feel the stretch along your left side.
4. Hold 15 to 30 seconds, then switch sides.
5. Repeat 2 to 4 times for each side.

Triceps stretch



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1. Stand with your back straight and your feet shoulder-width apart. You can do this stretch sitting down if you are not steady on your feet.
2. Bring your left elbow straight up while bending your arm.
3. Grab your left elbow with your right hand, and pull your left elbow toward your head with light pressure. If you are more flexible, you may pull your arm slightly behind your head. You will feel the stretch along the back of your arm.
4. Hold 15 to 30 seconds, then switch elbows.
5. Repeat 2 to 4 times for each arm.



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Calf stretch

1. Place your hands on a wall for balance. You can also do this with your hands on the back of a chair, a countertop, or a tree.
2. Step back with your left leg. Keep the leg straight, and press your left heel into the floor.
3. Press your hips forward, bending your right leg slightly. You will feel the stretch in your left calf.
4. Hold the stretch 15 to 30 seconds.
5. Repeat 2 to 4 times for each leg.

Quadriceps stretch



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1. Lie on your side with one hand supporting your head.
2. Bend your upper leg back and grab your ankle with your other hand.
3. Stretch your leg back by pulling your foot toward your buttocks. You will feel the stretch in the front of your thigh. If this causes stress on your knees, do not do this stretch.
4. Hold the stretch 15 to 30 seconds.
5. Repeat 2 to 4 times for each leg.

Groin stretch



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1. Sit on the floor and put the soles of your feet together.
2. Grab your ankles and gently pull your legs toward you.
3. Use your elbows to press your knees toward the floor. You will feel the stretch in your inner thighs.
4. Hold 15 to 30 seconds.
5. Repeat 2 to 4 times.

Hamstring stretch



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1. Lie on the floor. Extend your left leg out straight with your toes pointing up. If your back is uncomfortable, use a rolled washcloth or small towel for support.
2. Bend your right knee. To **increase back support, bend the left leg, placing the left foot on the floor**. Gently pull your right leg toward you as you straighten that knee. You should feel a gentle stretch down the back of your right leg.
3. Hold the stretch 15 to 30 seconds.
4. Repeat 2 to 4 times for each leg.

Back Extension - Prone



- 1) Lie on your stomach
- 2) Prop yourself up on your elbows extending your back
- 3) Start straightening your elbows, further extending your back
- 4) Continue straightening your elbows until a gentle stretch is felt
- 5) Hold for 15 seconds
- 6) Return to the starting position and repeat

Cat Stretch

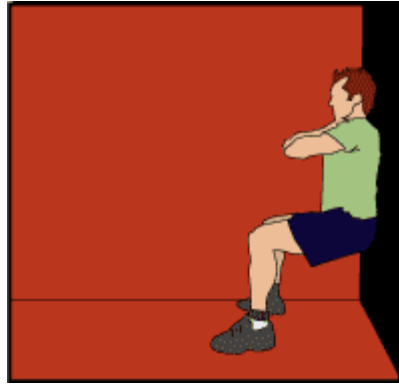
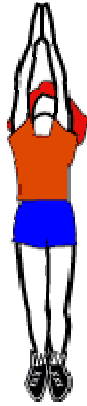
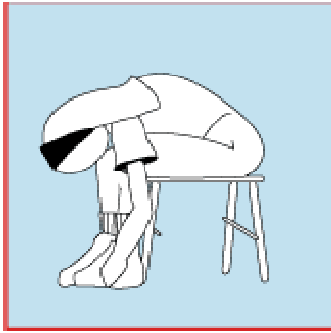


- 1) Get down on the floor on your hands and knees.
- 2) Push your back up towards the ceiling (like a cat arching it's back)
- 3) Continue arching until you feel a gentle stretch in your back
- 4) Hold for 15 seconds
- 5) Return to the starting position and repeat

The Pelvic Tilt



- 1) Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor
- 2) Exhale and press the small of your back against the floor
- 3) Hold for 15 seconds
- 4) Return to the starting position and repeat



Strong abdominal muscles help to protect the back. The **bicycle crunch exercise** pictured above came in at the top of the list of best exercises for the abdominals. This is the conclusion of a study at San Diego State University that compared 13 common abdominal exercises in order to find which ones really strengthen the abs.



Crunch on the ball



Plank on elbows and toes

1. Lie face down on mat resting on the forearms, palms flat on the floor.
2. Push off the floor, raising up onto toes and resting on the elbows.
3. Keep your back flat, in a straight line from head to heels.
4. Tilt your pelvis and contract your abdominals to prevent your rear end from sticking up in the air.
5. Hold for 20 to 60 seconds, lower and repeat for 3-5 reps.



Reverse Crunch

It may seem like the reverse crunch is for the lower abs but, remember, the rectus abdominis is one long muscle, so you can't separate upper from lower. To do this move correctly:

1. Lie on the floor and place hands on the floor or behind the head.
2. Bring the knees in towards the chest until they're bent to 90 degrees, with feet together or crossed.
3. Contract the abs to curl the hips off the floor, reaching the legs up towards the ceiling.
4. Lower and repeat for 12-16 reps.
5. It's a very small movement, so try to use your abs to lift your hips rather than swinging your legs and creating momentum.