

Stretching

What is the benefit of stretching?

The main reasons for stretching are to increase your flexibility and reduce your risk for injury. Stretching increases the range of motion of a muscle or joint. Stretching can also improve your circulation, decrease your stress level, and relax your muscles.

When should I stretch?

It's easier to stretch your muscles when they are warm. Five to 10 minutes of walking, bicycling, or jogging in place should be enough to warm them up.

It is best to stretch every day. It is especially important to stretch before and after weightlifting, running, or any other sport. Stretching before an activity improves flexibility and reduces your risk of injury. Stretching after workouts helps to relax the muscles and reduce soreness.

How should I stretch?

There are several ways to stretch, but the safest and most popular method involves static stretching. When you do static stretching, you slowly lengthen your muscle to the point where you feel a mild stretch. You then hold the position for 15 to 30 seconds and then slowly release the stretch. The most important rule to follow for any stretching exercise is that it must not hurt. If you stretch to the point of pain, the muscle will not relax and might get even tighter.

To stretch safely follow these rules:

- ✓ Never force a stretch—it should always be pain free.
- ✓ Never stretch when your muscles are cold.
- ✓ Avoid stretching if you have just injured a muscle or joint and you have swelling or bruising in the area.
- ✓ Avoid stretching in the area of a recent fracture.
- ✓ Use extra caution if you have osteoporosis or have been using steroid medicine.

What stretches should I do?

For a general stretching program, try to stretch all of the major muscles of the body. If you are getting ready for a certain activity (such as, running, tennis, or walking), make sure you stretch the parts of your body that you will use in that activity.

Basic Stretches

These basic exercises will stretch many of your major muscle groups.

- **Pectoralis stretch:** Stand in an open doorway or corner with both hands slightly above your head on the door frame or wall. Slowly lean forward until you feel a stretch in the front of your shoulders. Hold 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.
- **Wrist stretch:** Press the back of the hand on your injured side with your other hand to help bend your wrist. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Next, stretch the hand back by pressing the fingers in a backward direction. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Keep the arm on your injured side straight during this exercise. Do 3 sets.
- **Scalene stretch:** Sit or stand and clasp both hands behind your back. Lower your left shoulder and tilt your head toward the right until you feel a stretch. Hold this position for 15 to 30 seconds and then come back to the starting position. Then lower your right shoulder and tilt your head toward the left. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.
- **Standing hamstring stretch:** Put the heel of one leg on a stool about 15 inches high. Keep your leg straight. Lean forward, bending at the hips until you feel a mild stretch in the back of your thigh. Make sure you do not roll your shoulders or bend at the waist when doing this. You want to stretch your leg, not your lower back. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat with each leg 3 times.
- **Quadriceps stretch:** Stand sideways against a wall about an arm's length away from the wall. Facing straight ahead, brace yourself by keeping one hand against the wall. With your other hand, grasp the ankle of the leg further from the wall and pull your heel toward your buttocks. Don't arch or twist your back. Keep your knees together. Hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Turn around, facing the opposite direction, and repeat with the other leg.
- **Standing calf stretch:** Facing a wall, put your hands against the wall at about eye level. Keep one leg back with your heel on the floor. Keep the other leg forward. Turn your back foot slightly inward (as if you were pigeon-toed) and slowly lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in the back of your calf. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and then relax. Repeat 3 times in this position. Then switch the position of your legs and repeat the exercise 3 times. Do this exercise several times each day.
- **Hip flexor stretch:** Kneel and then put one leg forward. Keep your foot flat on the floor. Flatten your lower back and lean your hips forward slightly until you feel a stretch at the front of your hip. Try to keep your body upright as you do this. Hold this position for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times with each leg.
- **Gluteal stretch:** Lie on your back with both knees bent. Rest the ankle of one leg over the knee of your other leg. Grasp the thigh of the bottom leg and pull toward your chest. You will feel a stretch along the buttocks and possibly along the outside of your hip. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times with each leg.

- **Hip adductor stretch:** Lie on your back. Bend your knees and put your feet flat on the floor. Gently spread your knees apart, stretching the muscles on the inside of your thighs. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

- **Lower trunk rotation:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Tighten your stomach muscles and push your lower back into the floor. Keeping your shoulders down flat, gently rotate your legs to one side as far as you can. Then rotate your legs to the other side. Repeat 10 to 20 times.

- **Double knee to chest:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Tighten your stomach muscles and push your lower back into the floor. Pull both knees up to your chest. Hold for 5 seconds. Relax and then repeat 10 to 20 times.

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