

Walking Stretches

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Note: If you have had any recent surgery, muscle or joint problem, please consult your personal health care professional before starting a stretching or exercise program. Stretching should be done before and after activity or whenever you feel like it.

How to Stretch:

Stretching should be done slowly without bouncing. Stretch to where you feel a slight, easy stretch. Hold this feeling for 5-30 seconds. As you hold this stretch, the feeling of tension should diminish. If it doesn't, just ease off slightly into a more comfortable stretch. The easy stretch reduces tension and readies the tissues for the developmental stretch.

After holding the easy stretch move a fraction of an inch farther into the stretch until you feel mild tension again. This is the developmental stretch which should be held for 5-30 seconds. This feeling of stretch tension should also slightly diminish or stay the same.

If the tension increases or becomes painful, you are overstretching. Ease off a bit to a comfortable stretch. The developmental stretch reduces tension and will safely increase flexibility.

Hold only stretch tensions that feel good to you. The key to stretching is to be relaxed while you concentrate on the area being stretched. Your breathing should be slow, deep and rhythmic. Don't worry about how far you can stretch. Stretch relaxed and limberness will become just one of the many by-products of regular stretching.

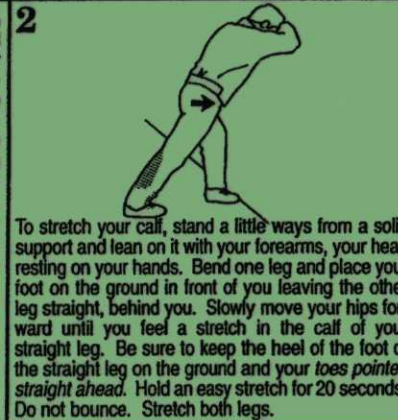
Do a light warm-up of walking or jogging for several minutes prior to stretching.

The dotted areas are those areas of the body where you will most likely feel the stretch.

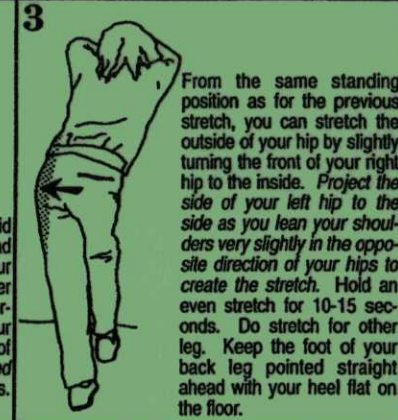
Before:



Stand in this bent-knee position to contract the quadriceps and relax the hamstrings. Hold for 30 seconds. The primary function of the quadriceps is to straighten the leg; the hamstrings bend the knee. Because these muscles have opposing actions, tightening the quadriceps will relax the hamstrings. This position also stretches both Achilles tendon and ankle areas. Now, as you hold the bent-knee position, feel the difference between the front of the thigh and the back of the thigh. The quadriceps should feel hard and tight while the hamstrings should feel soft and relaxed. Breathe easily.



To stretch your calf, stand a little ways from a solid support and lean on it with your forearms, your head resting on your hands. Bend one leg and place your foot on the ground in front of you leaving the other leg straight, behind you. Slowly move your hips forward until you feel a stretch in the calf of your straight leg. Be sure to keep the heel of the foot of the straight leg on the ground and your toes pointed straight ahead. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds. Do not bounce. Stretch both legs.



From the same standing position as for the previous stretch, you can stretch the outside of your hip by slightly turning the front of your right hip to the inside. Project the side of your left hip to the side as you lean your shoulders very slightly in the opposite direction of your hips to create the stretch. Hold an even stretch for 10-15 seconds. Do stretch for other leg. Keep the foot of your back leg pointed straight ahead with your heel flat on the floor.



Hold top of left foot (from inside of foot) with right hand and gently pull, heel moving toward buttocks. You may also do this stretch with left hand to left foot. Hold for 10-15 seconds. Repeat for right leg.



Put the soles of your feet together with your heels a comfortable distance from your groin. With your hands around your feet slowly contract your abdominals to assist you in flexing forward until you feel an easy stretch in the groin. Make your movement forward by bending from the hips and not from the shoulders. If possible, keep your elbows on the outside of your lower legs for greater stability during the stretch. Hold a comfortable stretch for 15-20 seconds. Do not hold your breath.



With your right leg straight, put your left foot flat on the ground on the other side of your right knee. Reach over your left leg with your right arm so that your elbow is on the outside of your left leg. With your left hand resting on the ground behind you, slowly turn your head to look over your left shoulder, and at the same time, turn your upper body (but not your hips) toward left hand and arm. Be sure to bend your right elbow and to gently push it against your bent leg. This will help create and stabilize the stretch. Hold for 10 seconds for each side. Stretches the outside of your upper leg and lower back. Breathe rhythmically.



To stretch the right upper hamstrings and hip, hold onto the outside of your ankle with one hand, with your other hand and forearm around your bent knee. Gently pull the right leg as one unit toward your chest until you feel an easy stretch in the back of the upper leg. You may want to do this stretch while you rest your back against something for support. Hold for 15-20 seconds. Make sure the leg is pulled as one unit so that no stress is felt in the knee.



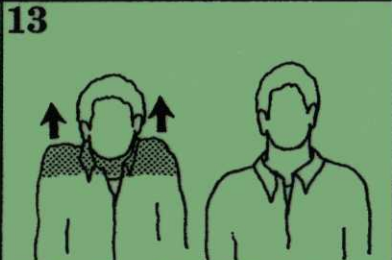
Next, straighten your right leg. The sole of your left foot will be resting next to the inside of your straightened leg. Lean slightly forward from the hips and stretch the hamstrings of your right leg. Find an easy stretch and relax. If you can't touch your toes comfortably use a towel to help you stretch. Hold for 15 seconds. Do not lock your knee. Your right quadriceps should be soft and relaxed during the stretch. Keep your right foot upright with the ankle and toes relaxed. Breathe.



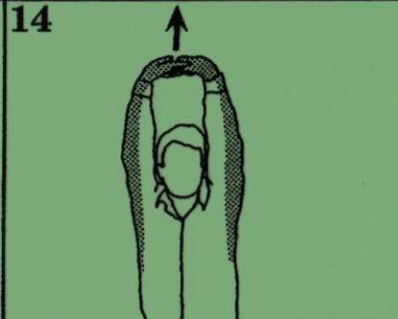
Repeat stretches 8, 9, 10 for other leg. As shown in the drawing above, move the right leg forward until the knee of the forward leg is directly over the ankle. Your left knee should be resting on the floor. Now without changing the position of the knee on the floor or the forward foot, lower the front of your hip downward to create an easy stretch. This stretch should be felt in front of the hip and possibly in your hamstrings and groin. This will help relieve tension in the lower back. Hold the stretch for 10-20 seconds.



With your hands shoulder-width apart on this support, relax, keeping your arms straight and your chest moving downward, and your feet remaining directly under your hips. Keep your knees slightly bent (1"). Hold this stretch 20 seconds. This is a good stretch to do anywhere, at anytime. (Remember to always bend your knees when coming out of this stretch.)



Shoulder Shrug: Raise the top of your shoulders toward your ears until you feel slight tension in your neck and shoulders. Hold this feeling of tension for 3-5 seconds, then relax your shoulders downward into their normal position. Do this 2-3 times. Good to use at the first signs of tightness or tension in the shoulder and neck area.



Interlace your fingers above your head. Now, with your palms facing upward, push your arms slightly back and up. Feel the stretch in your arms, shoulders and upper back. Hold stretch for 10 seconds. Do not hold your breath.



Repeat stretch 14 16 With arms overhead, hold the elbow of one arm with the hand of the other arm. Keeping knees slightly bent (1"), gently pull your elbow toward your head as you lean from your hips to the side. Hold an easy stretch for 10 seconds. Repeat stretch to other side. Keeping your knees slightly bent will give you better balance. Do not hold your breath.


After:

1




Standing with knees slightly bent, place the palms of your hands on your lower back just above your hips, fingers pointing downward. Gently push your hands forward to create an extension in the lower back. Hold a comfortable stretch for 10-12 seconds. Repeat twice.

2 Repeat stretch 10 (Before), both legs **3**



Start with your feet pointed straight ahead and a little more than shoulder width apart. Bend right knee slightly and move left hip downward toward your right knee. This gives you a stretch in your left inner thigh (left groin). Hold for 10-15 seconds and repeat for right leg.

4 Repeat stretch 10 (Before) **5**



Bend forward from the hips. Always keep your knees slightly bent during the stretch (1") so the lower back is not stressed. Let your neck, and hands relax. Go to the point where you feel a slight stretch in the back of your legs. (Stretch in the easy phase for 10-15 seconds until you are relaxed. Let yourself relax physically by mentally concentrating on the area being stretched. Do not stretch with knees locked or bounce when you stretch. Stretch by how you feel and not by how far you can reach. **Always bend your knees when returning to a standing position.**

6




With legs bent under you, reach forward with one arm and grab the end of a mat, carpet or anything you can hold onto. If you can't grab onto something just pull back with your arm straight while pressing down slightly with your hand. (Do likewise pulling on end of mat.) Hold stretch for 15 seconds. Stretch each side. Don't strain. You should feel the stretch in your shoulders, arms, sides, upper back, or even in your lower back.

7




Relax with your knees bent and the soles of your feet together. This comfortable position will stretch your groin. Hold this stretch for 20 seconds. Breathe deeply. If necessary, place a small pillow under your neck and head for comfort.

8




With knees bent, interlace your fingers behind your head and rest your arms on the floor. Using the power of your arms slowly bring your head forward until you feel a slight stretch in the back of your neck and shoulders. Hold an easy stretch for 5 seconds. Repeat three times. Do not overstretch.

9 Repeat stretch 8 **10**




Shoulder Blade Pinch: From the bent knee position pull your shoulder blades together to create tension in the upper back area. (As you do this your chest should move upward.) Hold this controlled tension for 4-5 seconds, then relax and gently pull your head forward as shown in stretch #8. This will help release tension and allow the neck to be stretched effectively. Think of creating tension, relaxing the same area, then stretching the back of the neck to help keep the muscles of the neck free to move without tightness. Repeat 3-4 times.

11




Next, straighten both legs and relax, then pull your left leg toward your chest. For this stretch keep the back of your head on the mat, if possible, but don't strain. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds. Repeat, pulling your right leg toward your chest.

12




From a bent-knee position, interlace your fingers behind your head and lift the left leg over the right leg. From here, use your left leg to pull your right leg toward the floor until you feel a good stretch. Stretch and relax. Keep the upper back, shoulders, and elbows flat on the floor. *The idea is not to touch the floor with your right knee, but to stretch within your limits.* Hold for 15-20 seconds. Repeat stretch for other side. Do not hold your breath.

13



Bend your leg and, with your opposite hand, pull that bent leg up and over your other leg as shown above. Turn your head to look toward the hand of the arm that is straight (head should be resting on the floor). Make sure the back of your shoulders are kept flat on the floor. Now, using your hand on your thigh (resting just above the knee), pull your bent leg down toward the floor until you get the right stretch feeling in your lower back and side of hip. Keep feet and ankles relaxed. Hold a comfortable stretch for 30 seconds, each side.

14




Straighten out your arms and legs. Point your fingers and toes as you stretch as far as you can. Stretch and relax. This is a good stretch for the entire body. Hold for 5 seconds.

15



Lie on your back, lift your leg up toward a 90° angle at the thigh joint until you feel a stretch in the back of the leg. Hold stretch for 15-20 seconds. Keep the low back flat against the floor during the stretch. Repeat for other leg.

16



Sitting on the floor with one leg straight, other leg bent, foot resting near opposite thigh, slowly pull your toes back toward your shin until you can go no further. Stop and hold the foot dorsiflexed. Next, slowly bend forward at the thigh joints until you feel a stretch in the back of the lower leg. Hold this stretch for approximately 10-15 seconds as you keep the foot dorsiflexed. An excellent stretch for the back of the lower leg. Stretch both legs. Breathe!

17



Elevate your feet. It is great for circulation and revitalization of tired legs and mind. Your lower back should be flat and not arched or off the floor. Do not elevate your feet for too long in the beginning, gradually increase the time (1-5 minutes, or longer).

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Bob and Jean Anderson, creators of this stretching chart are also the authors of the book, STRETCHING. Now a revised ©2010 edition; available spiral bound.