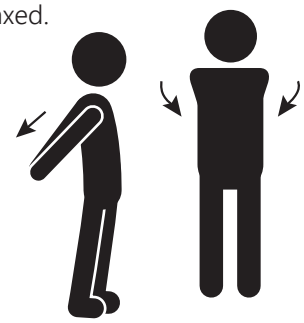
“My joints often feel stiff. What can I do to increase my flexibility?”

Stretching is one-third of fitness. It’s important to stretch so you can increase your flexibility and improve your range of motion.

You can stretch every day. It’s best to stretch after you have finished exercising, or after a short warm-up, such as a five-minute walk. Perform each stretch slowly and gently, moving to the point where you can feel tension in your muscles, but without any pain. Hold each stretch for 30-60 seconds while taking slow, deep breaths. Below are some stretching exercises you can do anywhere, anytime.

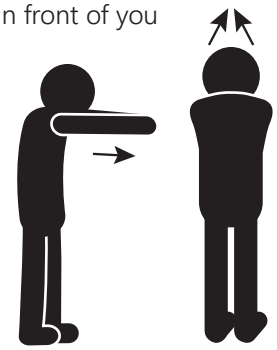
Chest expansion

- Stand tall with feet hip distance apart with slight bend in your knees.
- Clasp hands behind your back with your arms straight, keeping shoulders relaxed.
- Use a yoga tie, jump rope or towel if you are unable to clasp your hands together.
- Take deep breath in, and exhale as you slowly lift hands away from your lower back.



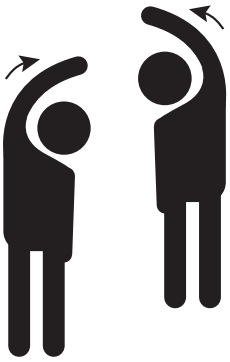
Back expansion

- Stand tall with feet hip distance apart with slight bend in your knees.
- Clasp your hands together out in front of you with your arms extended long.
- Feel your shoulder blades open away from one another, keeping your shoulders relaxed down your back.
- Take a breath in and exhale as you tuck your chin toward your chest.



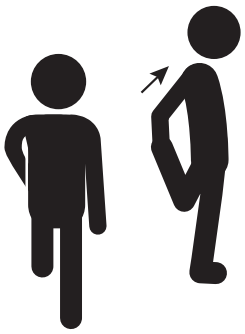
Side expansion

- Stand tall with feet hip distance apart with slight bend in your knees.
- Take a breath in as you lift your right arm overhead, exhale and stretch over to the left.
- Reach down your leg with the left arm.
- Avoid bending forward.
- Hold for 30-60 seconds. Repeat on the other side.



Standing quad stretch

- Stand tall and curl one heel up toward your buttocks as your hand clasps the top of the foot coming to balance on one leg.
- If you need to, use a chair or wall for support.
- Keep your knees side by side as you press the hip forward slightly and breathe.
- Switch sides after 30-60 seconds.



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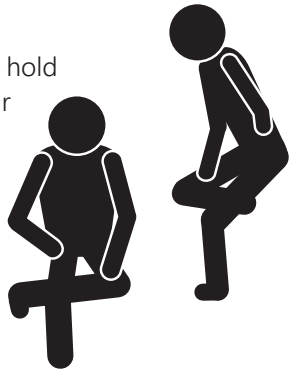
continued on back

Standing hip stretch

- Bend your right leg into a squat then lift your left leg and place the left ankle over the right thigh.
- The left leg and knee will be pointed outward.
- Keep your left foot flexed.
- As you continue to breathe and hold the stretch, work to deepen your squat as you gently press your left thigh toward the floor.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Use this as a balance exercise or use a wall for support.

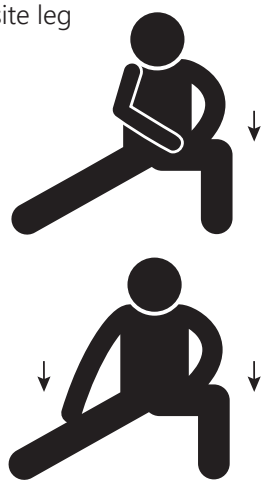


Standing hamstring stretch

- Bend one leg into a squat as you extend the opposite leg straight out in front of you with the heel pressing into the floor and toe flexed to the sky.
- Gently lean forward with a flat back.
- Rest your hands on the bent leg for support.
- If you need to, use a chair or wall for support.
- Hold and breathe.
- Repeat on the other side.

Standing inner thigh stretch

- Begin in a wide-legged stance.
- Bend into one leg sending your hip toward the wall behind you as the opposite leg stays straight.
- Keep your toes, knees and hips pointing forward.
- Rest your forearms on the bent thigh for support.
- Hold and breathe.
- Repeat on the other side.



Standing forward bend

- Stand tall with feet hip width apart.
- Raise arms overhead; draw abdominals in as you inhale.
- With an elongated spine, exhale and bend your knees and hips to hinge forward.
- Allow your spine to round, hands towards the ground and head hanging heavy.
- If there is discomfort in your lower back, bend deeply through your knees to rest your torso on your thighs.
- Hold and breathe into your back.
- Release slowly with knees bent and spine long.
- Roll up slowly back to a standing postition.

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