


GUIDE TO STRETCHES

Slide Show: A guide to basic stretches



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Stretching safely


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It's helpful to include stretching in your exercise regimen. Stretching can increase flexibility and improve your joint's range of motion, helping you move more freely. And ensuring that you have equal flexibility on both sides might help protect you from injury.

Before stretching, warm up with five to 10 minutes of light activity. Better yet, stretch after a workout. Keep stretches gentle and slow. Don't bounce. Breathe through your stretches. If you feel pain, you've stretched too far.

Hold a stretch for 10 to 30 seconds, to the point of a slight pull, on each side. Repeat the stretch on both sides two to four times. Stretching is recommended two to three days a week.

If you have health conditions or injuries, talk to your doctor or physical therapist about which stretches are right for you.




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Calf stretch

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Your calf muscle runs along the back of your lower leg. To stretch your calf muscles:

- Stand at arm's length from a wall or a piece of sturdy exercise equipment.
- Place your right foot behind your left foot.
- Slowly bend your left leg forward, keeping your right knee straight and your right heel on the floor.
- Hold your back straight and your hips forward. Don't rotate your feet inward or outward.
- Hold for about 30 seconds.
- Switch legs and repeat.
- To deepen the stretch, slightly bend your right knee as you bend your left leg forward.




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Hamstring stretch

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Your hamstring muscle runs along the back of your upper leg. To stretch your hamstring muscles:

- Lie on the floor near the outer corner of a wall or a door frame.
- Raise your left leg and rest your left heel against the wall. Keep your left knee slightly bent.
- Gently straighten your left leg until you feel a stretch along the back of your left thigh.
- Hold for about 30 seconds.
- Switch legs and repeat.
- As your flexibility increases, maximize the stretch by gradually scooting yourself closer to the wall or door frame.




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Quadriceps stretch

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Your quadriceps muscle runs along the front of your thigh. To stretch your quadriceps muscles:

- Stand 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.
- Tighten your stomach muscles to prevent your stomach from sagging outward, and keep your knees close together.
- Hold for about 30 seconds.
- Switch legs and repeat.



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Hip flexor stretch

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Your hip flexors, which allow you to lift your knees and flex at the waist, are located on your upper thighs, just below your hipbones. To stretch your hip flexors:

- Kneel on your right knee, cushioning your kneecap with a folded towel.
- Place your left foot in front of you, bending your knee and placing your left hand on your left leg for stability.
- Place your right hand on your right hip to avoid bending at the waist. Keep your back straight and abdominal muscles tight.
- Lean forward, shifting more body weight onto your front leg. You'll feel a stretch in your right thigh.
- Hold for about 30 seconds.
- Switch legs and repeat.