

Stretch!

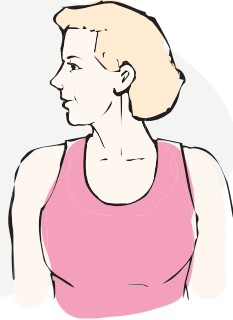
REGULAR STRETCHING EXERCISES can help you maintain flexibility and a good range of motion in the major joints. It can also improve circulation and relieve stress. Follow the stretching guidelines below. Sample stretches are shown below as well. For additional ideas about stretching, talk with a qualified fitness trainer or physical therapist, or consult a book on fitness, such as *Fitness for Everybody* by Diane Dahm and Jay Smith (available at www.Wellsource.com).

How to Stretch

- Stretch **after your aerobic activity** when your muscles are warmed up.
- Stretch all major muscle groups: neck, shoulders, back, hips, and legs.
- Slowly stretch to a full range of motion without pain.
- Avoid bouncing or fast movements.
- Hold each stretch for 15-30 seconds to get the maximum benefit.
- Do 2-4 stretches per muscle group.
- Aim for at least 2 stretching sessions a week.
- Avoid stretches that cause pain in a joint.
- Remember to breathe while stretching!

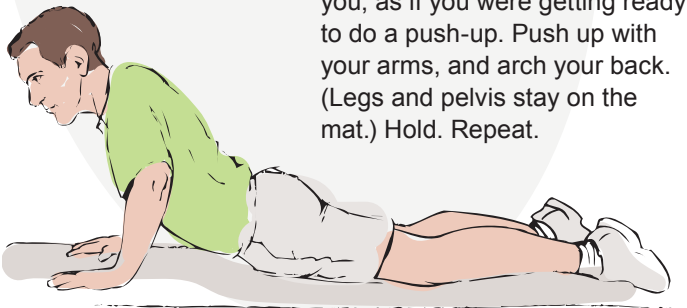
Neck

- ◀ **Side stretch.** Tilt the top of your head toward your shoulder. Hold. Repeat on the other side.
- **Front to back.** Bend your head forward, chin to chest. Hold. Then look up and hold briefly.
- ▶ **Rotation.** Slowly turn your head, looking over your shoulder. Hold. Repeat on the other side.



Back

- ◀ **Side stretch.** While standing, put one hand on your hip. Raise the other arm high over your head and lean toward the side with your hand on the hip. Feel the stretch all along your side. Hold. Repeat on the other side.
- **Lower back stretch.** While sitting with legs out in front at least 2 feet apart, lean forward and reach toward one foot. Hold. Repeat on the other side. Finish by stretching straight forward. Hold. Repeat.
- ▼ **Back extension.** Lie face down on a mat with your hands beside you, as if you were getting ready to do a push-up. Push up with your arms, and arch your back. (Legs and pelvis stay on the mat.) Hold. Repeat.



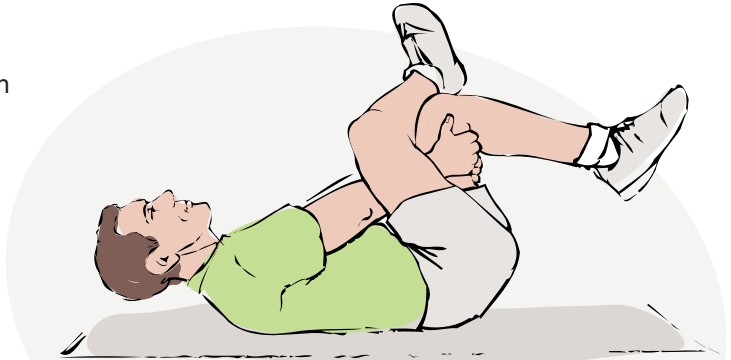
Shoulders/Chest

- ▲ **Overhead shoulder stretch.** With arms overhead and bent at the elbows, grasp your right elbow with your left hand and gently pull toward your head. Hold. Repeat on the other side.
- **Chest stretch.** With fingertips on shoulders, pull your elbows back. Hold stretch. Repeat.
- ◀ **Alternate chest stretch.** Stand facing a corner in the room. Place one hand on each wall, about head height. Lean forward into the corner, stretching the front of the chest. Hold. Repeat.

- **Kneeling back stretch.** Kneel on a mat, and sit back on your legs. Bend forward with arms outstretched. Then lean forward with hands on the mat, and keep your head low. If possible, place your forehead on the mat while stretching out. Keep your seat on your feet. Hold. Repeat.
- **Trunk Rotation.** While standing, hold your arms out in front, bent at the elbows with fingertips touching. Slowly turn and look over your shoulder. Bring your elbows around (in the same direction as your head) as far as you can do comfortably. Hold. Repeat on the other side.

Hips/Legs

- **Hamstring/hip stretch.** Lie on your back on a mat. Raise one leg, keeping it straight. Grab the leg behind the knee and pull it toward your head. Don't let the knee bend too much. While holding the stretch, flex toes down toward your body. Keep your other leg straight on the mat. Repeat on the other side.
- **Quadriceps stretch.** Stand beside a chair. Steady yourself by holding on to the back of the chair with one hand. Bend your other leg, and grab your ankle behind you. Pull upward to stretch the front of your leg. Hold. Repeat on the other side.
- ▼ **Inner thigh stretch.** Sit on a mat. Place the soles of your feet together. With your elbows, gently push your knees out and downward. Feel the stretch on the inner part of your legs. Hold. Repeat.



- ▲ **Gluteal (hip) stretch.** Lie on your back on a mat, knees bent. Cross your right foot over the front of your left knee, and rest it on the knee. Reach through with both hands to grasp your leg behind the left knee. Pull the knee toward your chest. Hold. Repeat on the other side.
- **Hip Rotation.** Lie on your back on a mat, knees bent. Keeping your knees together, rotate your knees to one side as far as you can comfortably. Hold. Repeat on the other side.
- **Heel and calf stretch.** Stand 1-2 feet from a wall or chair. Place hands on the wall (or the back of a chair) and lean forward, keeping your legs straight and your heels on the floor. Feel the stretch in the back of the calf. Hold. Repeat. Then do the same stretch with your knees slightly bent. Hold. Repeat.

Web Resources for Further Information on Stretching

- **Stretching exercises** – Prepared by Women's Heart Foundation. Exercises shown are good for both men and women. (www.womensheartfoundation.org/content/Exercise/stretching_exercise.asp)
- **Flexibility/Stretching Exercises** – Prepared by UCLA for office workers and students. (www.ergonomics.ucla.edu/Ex_Office.html)
- **Stretching Exercises, How to Improve Your Flexibility** – Prepared by National Institute on Aging especially for older individuals. (www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide/chapter04c.htm)

References:

1. *American College of Sports Medicine. ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription, 7th Edition. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins; 2005.*
2. *Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging. NIH. Available at www.niapublications.org/exercisebook/ExerciseGuideComplete.pdf. Accessed April 24, 2007.*
3. *Diane Dahm, Jay Smith, Fitness for Everybody, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota, 2005.*

