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Lower Back Stretches

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 can 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 5-15 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.

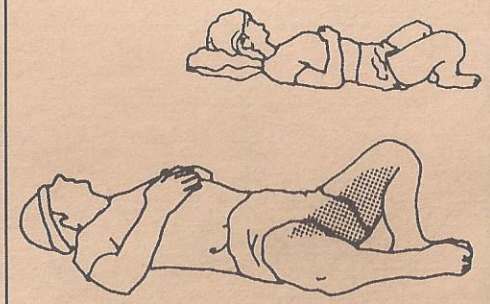
After holding the easy stretch move a fraction of an inch farther into the stretch until you feel mild tension again. This is the developmental stretch which should be held for 5-10 seconds. This feeling of stretch tension should also slightly diminish or stay the same. If the tension increases or becomes 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 rhythmical. 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 for several minutes prior to stretching.

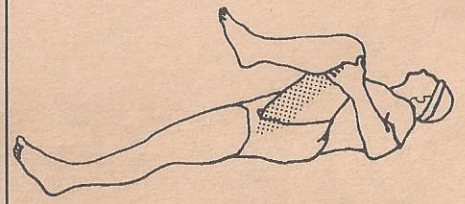
The dotted areas are those areas of the body where you will most likely feel the stretch.

1



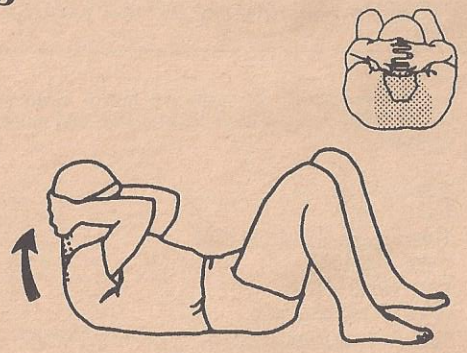
Relax with your knees bent and the soles of your feet together. (Lie with a pillow under your head if you'd like.) This comfortable position will stretch your groin. Hold this stretch for 50 seconds. Breathe deeply.

2



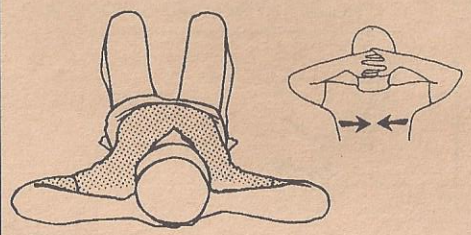
Next, straighten both legs and relax, then pull your left leg toward your chest. For this stretch keep the back of your head on the floor, if possible, but don't strain. Hold an easy stretch for 30 seconds. Repeat, pulling your right leg toward your chest. Do not hold your breath.

3



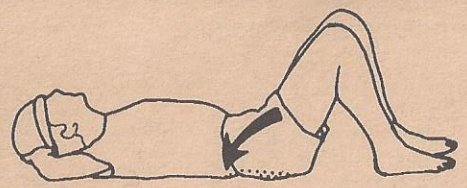
Interlace your fingers behind your head and rest your arms on the floor. Using the power of your arms, slowly bring your head and shoulders forward until you feel a slight stretch in the neck and upper back area. Think of elbows going toward mid-thighs. Hold an easy stretch for 5 seconds. Repeat three times. Do not overstretch.

4 Repeat stretch 3 5



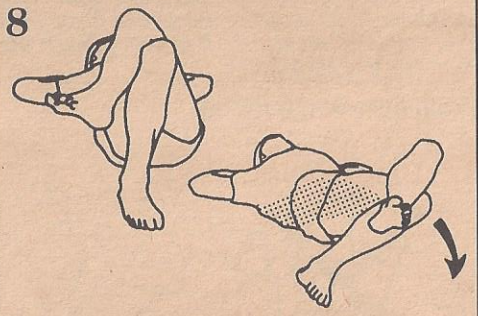
Shoulder Blade Pinch: From the bent-knee position pull your shoulder blades together to create tension in the upper back area. (As you do this your chest should move upward.) Hold this controlled tension for 4-5 seconds, then relax and gently pull your head forward as shown in stretch #3. This will help 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.

6 Repeat stretch 4 7



To relieve tension in lower back area, tighten your butt (gluteus) muscles and, at the same time, tighten your abdominal muscles to flatten your lower back. Hold this tension for 5-8 seconds, then relax. Repeat 2-3 times. Concentrate on maintaining constant muscle contraction. This pelvic tilting exercise will strengthen the gluteus and abdominal muscles so that you are able to sit and stand with good posture. Use these tension controls when sitting and standing.

8



Beginning in the same starting position as for the last stretch, 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 along the side of hip and/or lower back. 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 10-15 seconds. Repeat stretch for other side.

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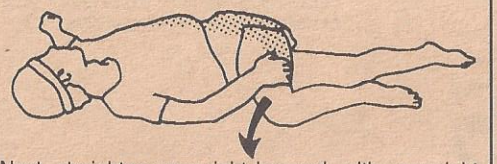
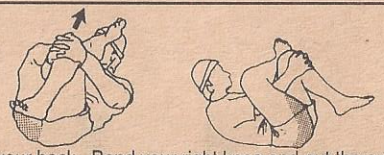
9



Next, straighten your right leg and, with your right hand, pull your 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 ground. 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 10-15 seconds, each side. Do not hold your breath.

10



Lie on your back. Bend your right knee and put the outside of your right lower leg just above your left knee. With your hands just below your left knee, gently pull your leg toward your chest until a stretch is felt in your right buttocks area (piriformis). Hold for 15-20 seconds. Lift the back of your head off the ground and look straight ahead as you stretch. Breathe slowly and deeply. Repeat for other side.

11

Now, pull both legs to your chest. Concentrate on keeping the back of your head down, and then curling your head up toward your knees. Hold 5-10 seconds.

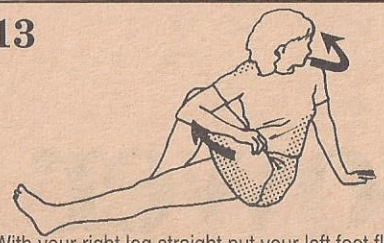
12

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

How to sit up from a lying position:

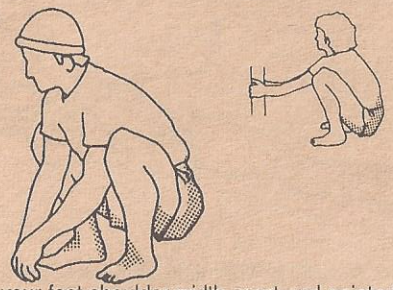
Bend both knees and roll over onto one side. While resting on your side, use your hands to push yourself up into a sitting position. By using your hands and arms this way, you take the pressure or stress off your back.

13



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 5-15 seconds for each side. Stretches the outside of your upper leg and lower back.

14



With your feet shoulder width apart and pointed out to about a 15° angle, heels on the ground, bend your knees and squat down. **If you have trouble staying in this position hold onto something for support.** It is a great stretch for your ankles, Achilles tendon areas, groin, lower back and hips. Hold stretch for 10-20 seconds. ***Be careful if you have had any knee problems. If pain is present discontinue this stretch.***

15

As in the drawing above, move one leg forward until the knee of the forward leg is directly over the ankle. Your other knee should be resting on the ground. Lower the front of your hip downward until an easy stretch is felt in front of the hip and possibly in your hamstrings and groin. Do this without changing the position of the knee on the ground or the forward foot. Hold the stretch for 15-20 seconds. Repeat for other leg.

16

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 palms forward to create an extension in the lower back. Hold comfortable pressure for 10-12 seconds. Repeat twice. Use this stretch after sitting for an extended period of time.

The abdominal curl (Ab Curl):

fig.1

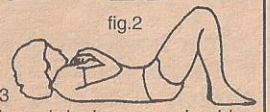
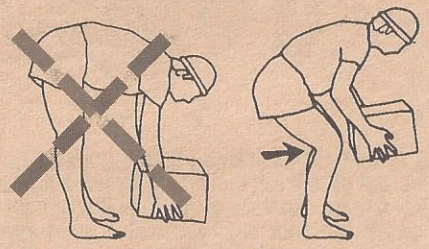


fig.2

fig.3

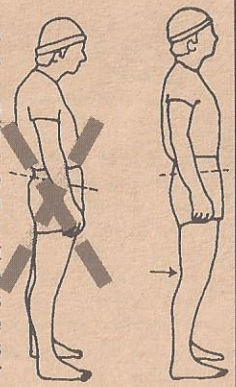
Start as in fig. 1. Curl up, bringing your shoulder blades off the floor about 30 degrees (fig.2), then lower back down to the floor (fig.3). Do not bob your head up and down, as this may strain your neck. Keep your head in a fixed position. Concentrate on the upper abdominals (solar plexis area), curling your upper body forward with your chin close to your chest (fig.2). When you lower, or uncurl, your upper body, the back of your head should not touch the floor because you are holding your chin near your chest (fig.3).

Back care when lifting:

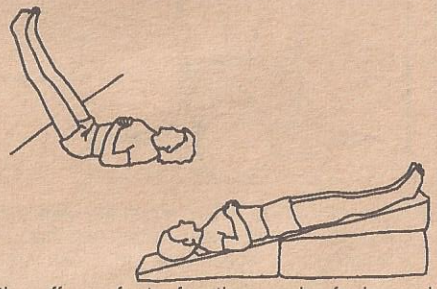


Never lift anything (heavy or light) with your legs straight. Always bend your knees when lifting something, so that bulk of the work is done by the big muscles of your legs, not the small muscles of your lower back. Keep the weight close to your body and your back as straight as possible.

Posture when standing:



Do not stand with knees locked. This tilts the hips forward and puts the pressure of standing directly on the lower back (a position of weakness). When standing, your knees should be slightly bent (1/2 inch) with feet pointed straight ahead. With knees slightly bent your body will be more aligned through the hips and lower back. Use the big muscles in the legs (quadriceps) to control your posture when standing.



Getting off your feet a few times a day feels good and helps relieve lower back tension. Elevating your feet is also 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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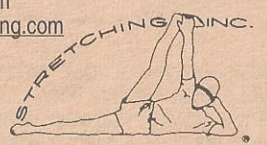

Bob and Jean Anderson, creators of this stretching chart are also the authors of the book, STRETCHING, a revised ©2000 edition.

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