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PREGNANCY STRETCHES

Note: If you have had any recent surgery, muscle or joint problems or are experiencing unusual, specific conditions during this pregnancy, 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 5-30 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 rhythmical; exhaling whenever you bend forward. Do not hold your breath.

Stretching correctly and regularly during pregnancy and the postpartum period can teach you how to relax, increase circulation, and relieve many of the discomforts felt during this time.

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

1

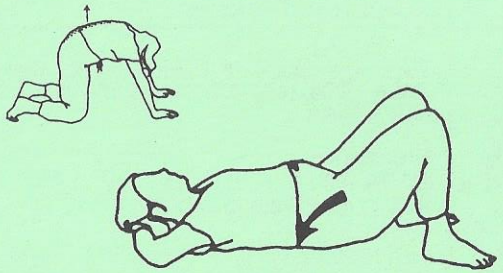
The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends avoiding lying flat on your back after the fourth month of pregnancy. Adapt stretches #1-6 by doing them lying on your side, sitting in a partially reclining position, or prop a pillow under one hip.
After stretching or exercising briefly on your back during the first four months of pregancy, roll to your left side to encourage good blood flow.

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

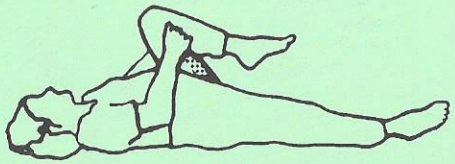
Interlace your fingers behind your head and rest your arms on the floor. Using the power of your arms, **slowly** bring your head and shoulders forward until you feel a slight stretch in the neck and upper back area. Think of elbows going toward mid-thighs. Hold an easy stretch for 5 seconds. Repeat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

3 Repeat stretch 2 4



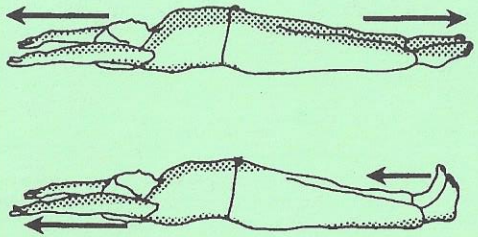
To relieve tension in lower back area, tighten your butt (gluteus) muscles and, at the same time, tighten your abdominal muscles to flatten your lower back. Hold this tension for 5-8 seconds, then relax. Repeat 2-3 times. Concentrate on maintaining constant muscle contraction. This pelvic tilting exercise 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. Do not hold breath.

5



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 30 seconds. Repeat, pulling your right leg toward your chest. Do not hold breath.

6 Repeat stretch 1 7



Straighten out your arms and legs. Point your fingers and toes as you stretch as far as you can. If you get cramps in your legs or feet, stretch your toes toward your knees instead of pointing them. Stretch and then relax. This is an excellent stretch for the entire body. Hold for 5 seconds. Breathe continuously.

Elevate your legs and feet:

Getting off your feet a few times a day feels good and helps relieve lower back tension. Elevatingh the feet is also excellent for circulation and revitalization of tired legs and mind. Do not elevate your feet for too long in the beginning. Elevating your feet at a 30° angle is most beneficial because there is little pressure on the lower back and there is less pooling of blood in the pelvic area.

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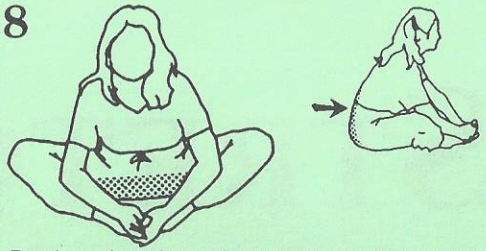
How to sit up from a lying position:

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.

8



Put the soles of your feet together with your heels a comfortable distance from your groin. Now, put your hands around your feet and slowly pull yourself 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 30-40 seconds. Breathe rhythmically.

9

Sit with your right leg bent, with your right heel just to the outside of your right hip. The left leg is bent and the sole of your left foot is next to the inside of your upper right leg. (Try not to let your right foot flare out to the side in this position.) Now slowly lean straight back until you feel an easy stretch in your right quadriceps. Use hands for balance and support. Hold an easy stretch for 30 seconds. **Do not hold any stretches that are painful to the knee.** Breathe.

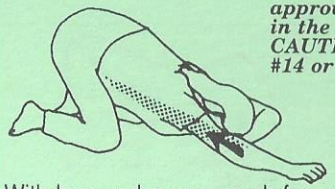
10 Repeat stretch 9 11

After stretching your quads, practice tightening the buttocks on the side of the bent leg as you turn the hip over. This will help stretch the front of your hip and give a better overall stretch to upper thigh area. After contracting the butt muscles for 5-8 seconds, let the buttock relax. Then continue to stretch quads for another 15 seconds.

12 Repeat stretches 9-12 for other leg. 13

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 50 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. Do not hold your breath.*

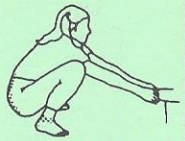
14



Consult your doctor for approval of these two stretches in the prenatal period. CAUTION: Do not do stretches #14 or 15 postpartum.

With legs under you, reach forward with one arm and grab the end of the 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 20 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. Breathe continuously.

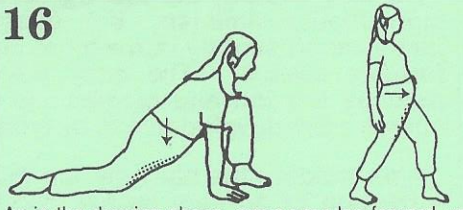
15



Do this stretch only if you are familiar with it, it is comfortable and can be held easily.

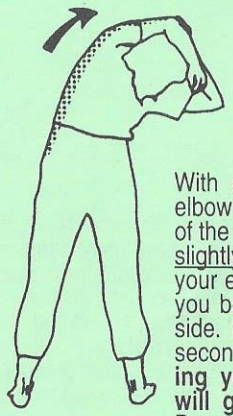
With your feet shoulder width apart and pointed out to about a 15° angle, heels on the ground, bend your knees and squat down. If you have trouble staying in this position hold onto something for support. It is a great stretch for your ankles, Achilles tendon areas, groin, lower back and hips. Hold stretch for 30 seconds. ***Be careful if you have had any knee problems. If pain is present discontinue this stretch.***

16



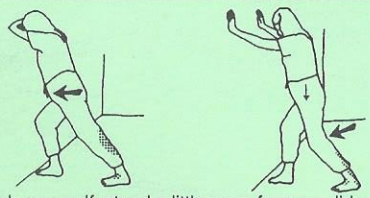
As in the drawing above, move your leg forward until the knee of the forward leg is directly over the ankle. Your other knee should be resting on the floor. **Lower the front of your hip downward** until an easy stretch is felt in the front of the hip and possibly in your hamstrings and groin. Do this without changing the position of the knee on the floor or the forward foot. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds. You can get a similar stretch in the front of your hip by **standing**, as illustrated above, **and moving your right hip forward** to create the stretch feeling. Do this with knees slightly bent and toes pointed straight ahead. This stretch can be done anywhere, anytime. Breathe.

17



With arms overhead, hold the elbow of one arm with the hand of the other arm. Keeping knees slightly bent (1 inch) gently pull your elbow behind your head as you bend from your hips to the side. Hold an easy stretch for 10 seconds. Do both sides. **Keeping your knees slightly bent will give you better balance.** Do not hold your breath.

18 19

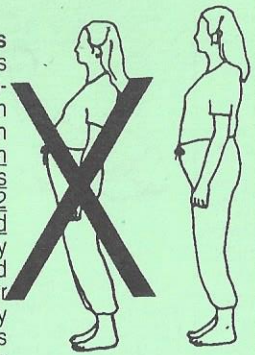


To stretch your calf, stand a little ways from a solid support and lean on it with your forearms, your head resting on your hands. Bend one leg and place your foot on the ground in front of you leaving the other leg straight, behind you. Slowly move your hips forward until you feel a stretch in the calf 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 30 seconds. Do not bounce. Stretch both legs.

Now, to stretch the soleus and Achilles tendon area, slighly bend the back knee, keeping the foot flat. This gives you a much lower stretch which is also good for maintaining or regaining ankle flexibility. 15 seconds, each leg. *This area needs only a slight feeling of stretch.*

Posture:

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. Your body will be more aligned through the hips and lower back with knees slightly bent. Use the big muslces in the legs (quadriceps) to control your posture when standing.



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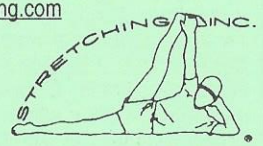

Bob and Jean Anderson, creators of this stretching chart are also the authors of the book, STRETCHING, a revised ©2010 edition, now available spiral bound.

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