

# STRETCHING PROGRAM

## WHY SHOULD WE STRETCH?

As we age, flexibility may decrease as a part of our natural aging process; however, this may be accelerated by incorrect posture or lack of muscle strength. Stretching is the best way to promote and maintain flexibility.

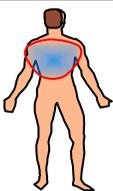
It is very important to warm-up your muscles and joints before stretching. During your regular warm-up and exercise, your muscles and surrounding connective tissue gradually warm up and loosen, allowing them to be safely stretched. It is a common mistake to stretch before exercising, when your muscles are "cold" and relatively stiff and doing so greatly increases your risk of injury. Therefore, we recommend stretching after you have done an aerobic warm up or exercise session.

## STRETCHING GUIDELINES

- ✓ Make sure that each stretch is performed slowly and gently.
- ✓ Stretch to where you feel mild tension, **not pain** in the muscle.
- ✓ Don't overstretch, bounce, or jerk – this will increase your chance of injury.
- ✓ Each stretch should be slow and gradual, allowing the connective tissues and muscles to safely lengthen, preventing any injury from occurring.
- ✓ Once you feel a comfortable stretch, hold for **10 – 30 seconds**. Stretches may be safely held for 60 seconds.
- ✓ Perform each stretch 2 – 3 times.
- ✓ Remember to breathe normally as you are holding the stretch – never hold your breath.
- ✓ Your heart rate should stay below your target heart rate when you are stretching. If you find your heart rate increasing (moving up towards your target), stop and take a break.

**Avoid any stretch that causes undue muscle or joint pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, or chest pain. If it bothers you to do any certain stretch, do not do that stretch. If you have any specific questions regarding how to modify a stretch or how exercise can affect arthritis, osteoporosis or osteoarthritis, please see a clinical exercise physiologist.**

**It is important to remember that all stretches done in a standing position should be done with feet shoulder width apart (feet directly over shoulders) and toes pointing forward. When standing, it is important to maintain a slight bend in the knees so that the lower back and knees are not overstressed**



*Please note:* The shaded area on the diagram located to the right of the stretch description shows where you should feel the stretch when performing that particular exercise. In this example, the stretch should be felt in the upper back.

## Balance Exercise



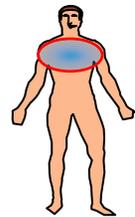
Begin with your feet hip-width apart and start to stagger your feet. Try to maintain your balance and distribute your weight evenly to each foot. To increase the challenge stand with your feet in tandem (1 foot in front of the other)

**Progression:** To further increase the challenge, try crossing your arms over your chest or closing your eyes.

## Chest Stretch



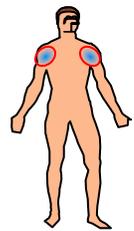
Extend your arms out to your sides, bending your elbows slightly, making the shape of a "W" with your arms. Your elbows should be below the level of your armpits. Relax your shoulders, and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Try not to slouch forwards or backwards. Hold for 10-30 seconds. This stretch should be felt in your chest area.



## Shoulder Stretch



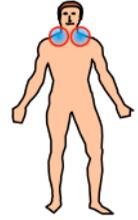
Bring your arm across your body while keeping it straight. With your other hand, hold your arm above or below the elbow and pull it towards your body. Avoid pressing directly on the elbow as this will stress the joint. Hold for 10-30 seconds and repeat with your other arm. This stretch should be felt in the shoulder of the arm that is across your body.





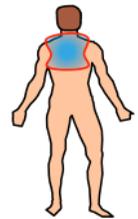
## Ear to Shoulder Stretch

Stand up straight with your feet hip width apart. Relax your shoulders down away from your ears. Slowly lower your head toward one shoulder, only tilting far enough to feel a gentle stretch on the opposite side of your neck. Hold for 10-30 seconds and repeat on the other side.



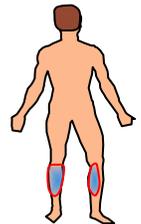
## Chin to Chest Stretch

Stand up straight with your feet hip width apart. Relax your shoulders down away from your ears. Slowly lower your chin down towards your chest, stopping at the point of gentle tension. Hold for 10-30 seconds. This stretch should be felt in the upper back and neck.



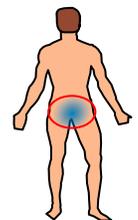
## Standing Calf Stretch

Take a large step forward and bend your front knee. Press your back heel down to the floor and keep the back leg straight. Make sure that both feet are pointing forward and that you are able to see your toes under your front knee (if you cannot see your toes, take a larger step forward). Hold for 10 – 30 seconds and repeat with the other leg. This stretch should be felt in the calf (lower portion) of your back leg.



## Seated Gluteal Stretch

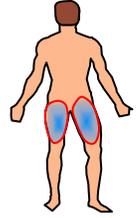
Begin seated at the edge of a chair. Bend one leg and reach behind the knee to gently pull your leg in toward your chest. Ensure that you are not slouching or rounding into the lower back. Hold for 10 – 30 seconds, and then repeat with the other leg. This stretch should be felt in the buttock of the leg that is being held.



## Seated Hamstring Stretch



Begin seated on the edge of a chair. Extend one leg and plant your heel on the floor, toes pointing up. Keep tall in your lower back and bend forward from the hips toward the extended leg until a comfortable stretch is felt in the back of your leg. It is important to avoid rounding or slouching in the lower back. Hold for 10 – 30 seconds and repeat with the other leg.



\*\* If lower back pain or discomfort occurs with the seated hamstring stretch try the alternate stretch below. If no relief is provided consult a doctor or physiotherapist.

## Supine Hamstring Stretch



Laying on your back, bend both legs so that your feet are flat on the floor. Extend one leg straight, grasping below the back of the knee and pull gently until you feel a comfortable stretch in the back of the leg. It is important that the lower back and buttocks stay on the floor. Hold for 10- 30 seconds and repeat with the other leg.

## IMPORTANT

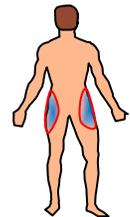
**If you have had hip replacement surgery, please do NOT do the following stretch. For the remaining stretches please pay attention to how you are feeling and do not do any stretch that causes pain or discomfort.**

## Seated Piriformis Stretch



While seated in a chair cross your right foot over your left ankle. Allow the right knee to relax down away from the body until a gentle stretch is felt in the external hip/ buttock. Hold for 10 – 30 seconds. Repeat with the other leg.

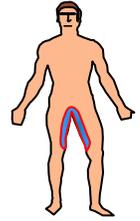
**Progression:** Bring your right ankle to your left knee. Allow the knee to relax down away from the body.



## Seated Groin Stretch



While seated with your back straight, place the soles of your feet together. Allow your knees to relax, and fall towards the floor. You can place your hands behind you to help support your back. Bringing your feet closer to your body will increase the stretch. Hold for 10 – 30 seconds. This stretch should be felt in the groin / inner thigh.



This stretch may also be performed seated in a chair. Shift your body to the right side of the chair. Sit up straight and open your right leg to the side. Hold for 10-30 seconds.



## Seated Quadriceps Stretch / Hip Flexor Stretch

While seated, shift your body to the right side of a chair. Drop your right knee toward the ground, keeping your knee bent. Tilt your pelvis under and press down through the bent leg. Hold for 10 – 30 seconds. Repeat the stretch on your left side. This stretch should be felt throughout the front of your hip and thigh.

