



# A Guide to Stretching



Rehabilitation

# A GUIDE TO STRETCHING SAFELY

Flexibility may decrease as a part of the natural aging process. Incorrect posture or lack of muscle strength can also contribute to decreased flexibility.

Stretching is the best way to promote and maintain flexibility.

## WARM-UP

It is very important to warm-up your muscles and joints before stretching. During warm-up and exercise, your muscles and joints gradually 'loosen' allowing them to be safely stretched.

## STRETCH AFTER EXERCISE

We strongly recommend stretching **after** you have done an aerobic warm-up or exercise session to avoid risk of injury. Stretching before exercising, when your muscles are "cold" and relatively stiff can increase the risk of injury.



**Avoid any stretch that causes 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 speak to a clinical exercise physiologist.**

# A GUIDE TO STRETCHING SAFELY

- Perform each stretch slowly and gently. This allows the connective tissues and muscles to safely lengthen and prevents injuries occurring from during stretching.
- Stretch to where you feel mild tension, **not pain** in the muscle.
- 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.
- Don't overstretch, bounce, or jerk – this will increase your chance of injury.
- Your effort should be light intensity AND below your target heart rate (if you were given one) while stretching. If your effort level is above either of those, stop and take a break.

## TIP

**Each stretch includes a picture to demonstrate the exercise, along with a white circle to show where you should feel the stretch. The lower grey bar on each slide also tells you where the stretch should be felt when performed correctly.**

# CHEST STRETCH



- Extend your arms out to your sides, bending your elbows slightly to make a “W” shape.
- Your elbows should be below the level of your armpits.
- Relax your shoulders and squeeze your shoulder blades together.
- Maintain an upright posture. Try not to slouch forwards or backwards.
- Hold for 10 – 30 seconds.

**You should feel this stretch in your chest area.**

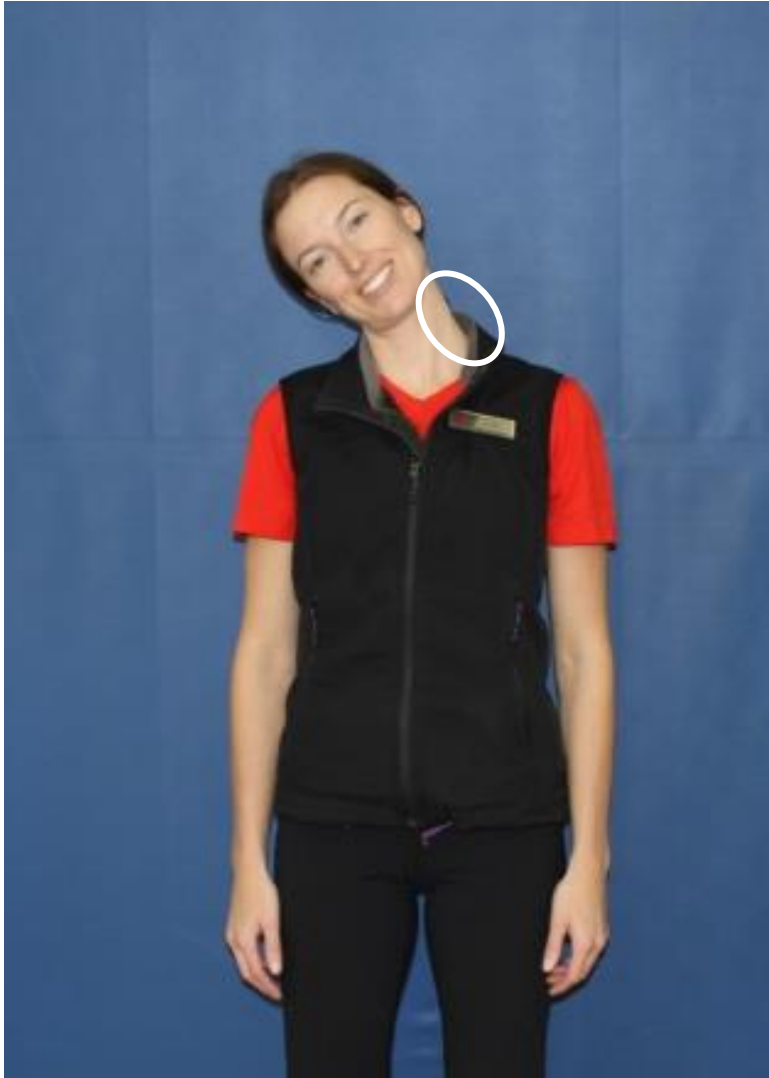
# SHOULDER STRETCH



- Bring one arm across your body while keeping it straight.
  - With your opposite 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.
- ➔ **Tip:** Try to keep your shoulders relaxed (try not to let your shoulder rise up to your ear).

**You should feel this stretch in the shoulder of the arm that is stretched across your body.**

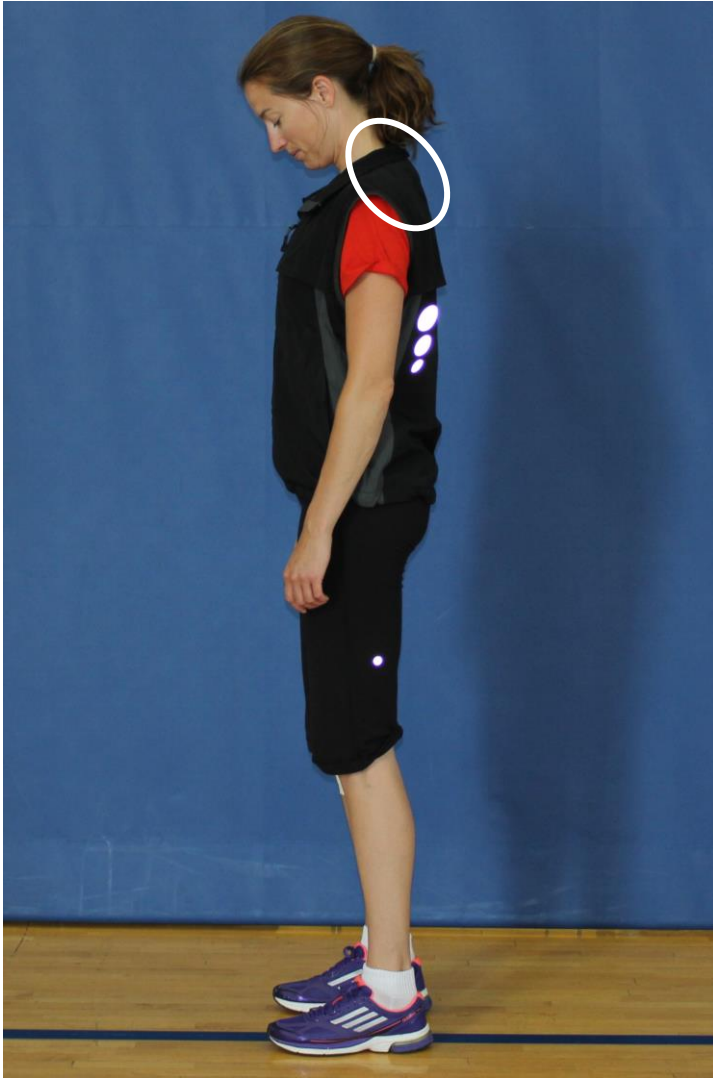
# EAR TO SHOULDER STRETCH



- 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.

**You should feel this stretch on the side of your neck.**

# 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.

**You should feel this stretch in your 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 can 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.
- ➔ **Tip:** Hold onto a stable surface like a chair or counter, if you need more balance.

**You should feel this stretch in the calf (lower portion) of your back leg.**



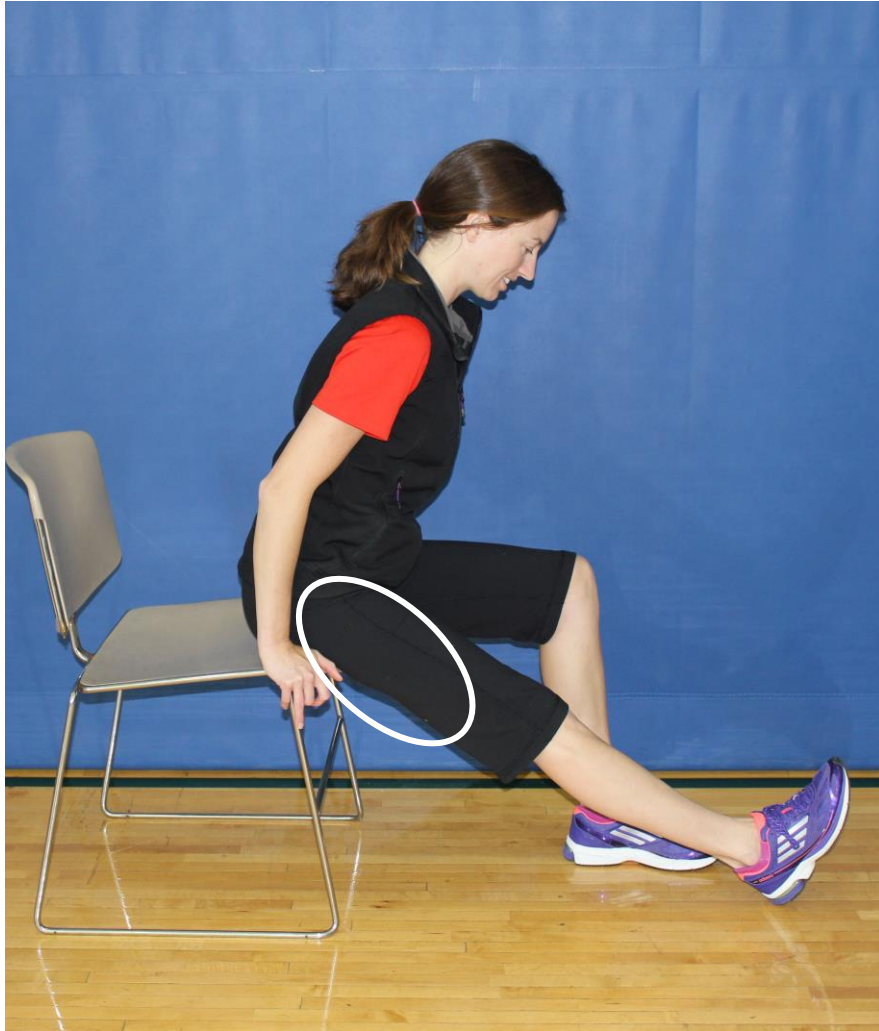
# SEATED GLUTEAL STRETCH



- 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.
  - Maintain upright posture. Ensure that you are not slouching or rounding into the lower back.
  - Lean back so that your upper back is against the back of the chair – keep sitting at the edge of the chair.
  - Hold for 10 – 30 seconds, and then repeat with the other leg.
- ➔ **Tip:** To progress this stretch, try to bring your knee across your body (e.g. right knee to left chest).

**You should feel this in the buttock of the leg that is being held.**

# SEATED HAMSTRING STRETCH



- Begin seated at the edge of a chair.
  - Extend one leg and plant your heel on the floor, toes pointing up.
  - Maintain upright posture. Keep your chest up 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 stretch for 10 – 30 seconds and repeat with other leg.
- ➔ **Tip:** If lower back pain or discomfort occurs with seated hamstring stretch, try the alternate supine hamstring stretch on next page. If no relief is provided, speak to your clinical exercise physiologist.

**You should feel this stretch in hamstrings (back of upper leg).**

# 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.

**You should feel this stretch in hamstrings (back of upper leg).**

# SEATED PIRIFORMIS STRETCH

## IMPORTANT:

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



- 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.
- ➔ **Tip:** To progress this exercise, bring your right ankle to your left knee. Allow the knee to relax down away from the body.

**You should feel this stretch in the outside hip and buttock.**

# SEATED GROIN STRETCH



- While seated with your back straight, place the soles of your feet together. Allow your knees to relax and fall to the floor.
- You can place your hands behind you to help support your back.
- Hold this stretch for 10 – 30 seconds.
- Bringing your feet closer to your body will increase the stretch.

## CHAIR MODIFICATION:

- This stretch can also be done 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. Repeat on opposite side.

**IMPORTANT:** If you have had hip replacement surgery, please pay attention to how you are feeling and do not perform any stretch that causes pain or discomfort.

**You should feel this stretch in the groin/inner thigh area.**



# SEATED QUADRICEPS + 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.
  - Keep your body upright with your chest up.
  - Hold for 10 – 30 seconds.
  - Repeat the stretch on your left side.
- ➔ **Tip:** To increase the stretch more, extend your bent leg farther back. If you need more of a stretch, try pushing the ground back away from your body.

**IMPORTANT:** If you have had hip replacement surgery, please pay attention to how you are feeling and do not perform any stretch that causes pain or discomfort.

**You should feel this stretch throughout the front of your hip and thigh.**