

# The Basic Flexibility Workout

Flexible people can easily reach or bend for things they need, and sudden movements don't result in pulled muscles. Stretching all your joints is important to maintain a full range of motion.

Maintaining a full range of motion means your muscles should be able to pass through a complete range of movement easily and with no pain. In addition, stretching in the abdominal, back, and upper leg areas can help you develop and maintain a healthy low back. Low-back pain is one of the most common complaints, and one of the most frequent causes of activity limitation, among adults in the U.S. Good flexibility and range of motion can decrease the probability of a low-back problem. If you do have a backache, good range of motion can be a factor in reducing the severity of the problem. Maintaining good physical fitness and strengthening your trunk muscles with appropriate exercises are keys to decreasing the chances of having low-back pain.



## Stretching Tips

- All warm-up programs should consist of pulse-raising activities, along with mobility and stretching activities.
- Only stretch after the muscles have warmed up.
- Only stretch to the point of mild tension. Stretching should never be painful.
- Don't bounce or use jerky movements when you are stretching.
- Do not hold your breath. Breathing normally will help you relax.

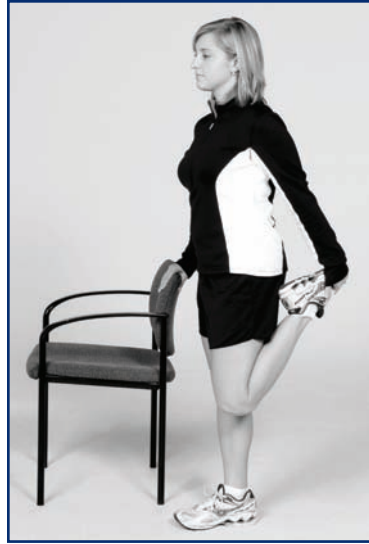
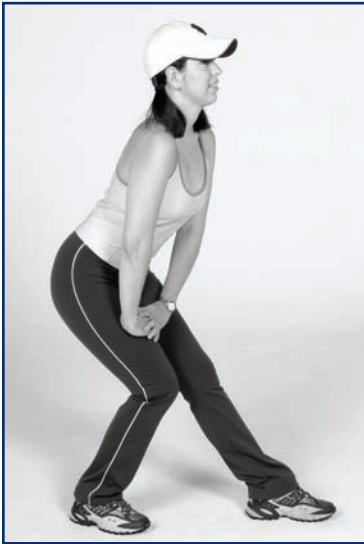
## What to Do

Try the following exercises. Repeat each one, holding it for 20 seconds; gradually build to 30 seconds if you still feel tight. For more options go to [www.nia.nih.gov/exercisebook/chapter4\\_stretching.htm](http://www.nia.nih.gov/exercisebook/chapter4_stretching.htm).



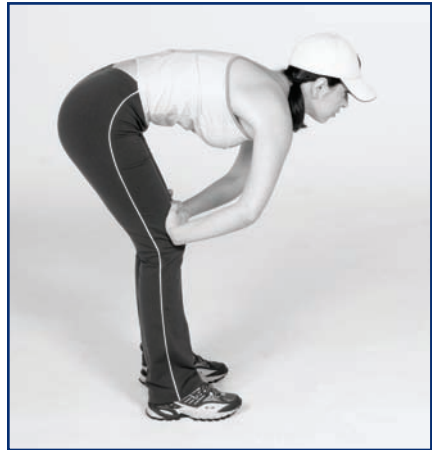
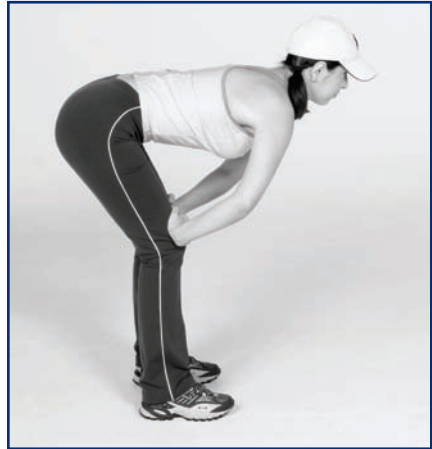
To **stretch your calf (back of lower leg)**, stand with feet hip-width apart, back straight, and stomach tight. Keep the knees slightly bent. In a straight line from head to the left heel, lean forward, keeping the left heel on the floor. Place both hands on right thigh. Repeat on other side. The front leg should be kept over the ankle.

For a **hamstring stretch (back of thigh)**, stand up straight, with your right foot slightly behind hips. Slowly bend the rear leg as if sitting backwards. Keep the front leg straight with a very slight bend at the knee. Place hands on right thigh. Push buttocks backwards, slowly, until you feel a slight tension in your hamstring. Keep your neck in line with your spine. Never place your hands on the front leg. Make sure your feet are correctly positioned for balance before stretching.



To **strengthen the front of your thigh (quadriceps)**, stand with feet together, bend your left knee and with your left hand lift the left foot towards your buttocks. Bend slightly on the supporting leg. Keep the knees close together. Tilt the pelvis forward and keep the back straight. Always keep the support leg bent. Use a wall or other object for balance. Keep your back straight and stomach tight.

For **chest and shoulders (pectoralis and deltoid)** stretch, stand with feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. Place both hands on the buttocks and gently ease the shoulders backwards. This should give a feeling of the chest “opening.” Hold.



The **lower back** stretch starts when you stand with feet shoulder-width apart, knees bent, with your hands on thighs. Shoulders should be slightly apart. Slowly pull stomach in and curl upwards (similar to a cat). Hold. Be sure your weight is supported by placing your hands on your thighs. Be careful to slowly uncurl to original position. Keep chin up and eyes focused in front of you.

To stretch your **upper back**, stand with feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. Clasp your hands in front of you at shoulder height with the palms away from the body. Gently push the palms outward, without locking the elbows. Keep your back straight and the tummy tight, knees slightly bent.



Another way to stretch your **shoulder** is to take the right arm across the body at shoulder height, keeping the shoulder relaxed. Place the left hand or forearm on the right arm slightly above the elbow and gently bring the right arm towards the chest. Keep the back straight and stomach tight. Make sure the knees are slightly bent at all times. Keep head facing forward.

To **stretch over-all**, stand with feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. Raise your arms overhead and bring your hands together. Slowly begin to stretch upward.

To stretch your **hips**, sit on a mat with your right leg straight in front of you. Bend your left leg and cross it over your right leg so that your left foot is alongside your right knee. Bring your right elbow across your body and place it on the outside of your left thigh near the knee. Slowly twist your body as you look over your left shoulder. Your right elbow should be exerting pressure against your left thigh. Repeat in the other direction.

