

***Important Note:** Only take each stretch to the point of mild discomfort and hold. Do not bounce. Stretches should be uncomfortable **BUT NOT** painful. Please reach out for additional modifications or substitute stretches if necessary.

Week 1 – Lower Back Stretches

The back is a complicated structure consisting of many bones, joints, ligaments, and muscles that can be sprained, strained, broken, and ruptured. A lower back injury can be very painful therefore, it is important to do what we can to protect our lower back. ¹ Stretches like the three highlighted below help to maintain proper posture, improve range of motion, maintain a healthy spine, and reduce tension in the muscles that support the spine.²

Fact: According to the American Chiropractic Association about 31 million Americans experience low back pain at any given time and is the third most common reason for doctor's office visits.¹

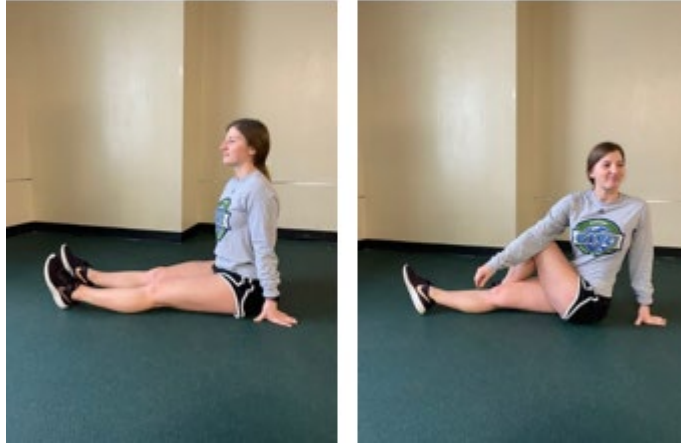
Stretch: Cat-Cow



Benefits: Opens up the spine and comfortably stretches it while also helping to strengthen the abdominals and obliques to help maintain good posture.

How to: The starting position for this stretch will be down on the floor on your hands and knees with your palms flat beneath your shoulders, your knees beneath your hips, and your head and back in a neutral position. For the “Cat” portion of the stretch, you will push your spine up, allowing your back to round while you tuck your pelvis under and your chin into your chest (hold for the designated time on calendar). Return to the starting position. For the “Cow” portion of the stretch, bring your head up slightly (do not rotate your head all the way back) while you push your stomach towards the floor and your bottom towards the ceiling forming an arch in your back (hold for the designated time).

Stretch: Seated Toro Twist



Benefits: Improves spinal flexibility.

How to: The starting position for this stretch will be seated with legs extended out in front of you on the floor. Bend your left knee and place your left foot on the floor to the outside of your right thigh (or slightly lower if it is more comfortable). Next, twist your torso to the left placing your left hand on the floor behind you while bringing your right arm across the body and placing your elbow on the outside of your knee. Once in this position use your right arm to press into your thigh allowing you to twist your torso until you can feel the stretch. Hold for the designated time on calendar and repeat on the opposite side. If you are unable to bring your arm across your body, you can wrap your arm around your leg and place your hand on your knee to twist your torso.

Stretch: Knee(s) to Chest



Benefits: Improves spinal flexibility.

How to: The starting position for this stretch is on the floor, lying on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Bring both knees to your chest using your hands to pull them in and hold for the designated time on calendar. Your head should be rested on the floor and try relax your pelvis and lower back as much as you can. If you would prefer you can do this one leg at a time. The leg that is not being pulled towards your chest will stay in the starting position (to feel more of a stretch you can put the leg flat on the floor). You would then hold each leg for the designated time on calendar.

Week 2 – Hip Stretches

Our hips joints are responsible for a lot of mobility. They are essential for walking, running, dancing, and much more but the truth is many of us have reasonably sedentary jobs causing those joints to become stiff and immobile. When this happens, the body uses the joints above and below our hips to compensate. Having good hip mobility will help to avoid injury and move more efficiently. ³

Stretch: Lizard Pose



Benefits: Full range of motion that stretches the hamstrings, hip flexors, and quadriceps to improve mobility.

How to: The starting position for this stretch will be in a downward dog position (see first photo). Bring one leg forward placing your foot flat on the ground to the outside edge of your hand (you should be in a lunge position). Lower your back knee to the ground (or it can remain off the ground) as you press into your hips keeping your arms straight and a flat back. For a deeper stretch, you can bring your forearms to the floor. Hold for the designated time on calendar. Return to starting position and repeat on the opposite leg. Side note: Feel free to put a cushion/blanket under your knee to provide a comfortable support during the stretch.

Stretch: Pigeon



Benefits: Opens the hip joints. Flexion and extension in the knees and hips.

How to: The starting position for this stretch will be in a downward dog position (see first photo). Next, bring one leg forward, bending at the knee, bringing it down to the floor resting your shin (the further forward you bring your heel the deeper the stretch will be). Keep the forward foot flexed. The other leg slides back behind you and you lower your buttocks to the floor (or as close as possible). Try to maintain equal weight on both hips during the stretch. Your hands should be to the outside of your legs. Hold the stretch for the designated time on calendar. Return to starting position and repeat on the opposite leg.

Stretch: Butterfly

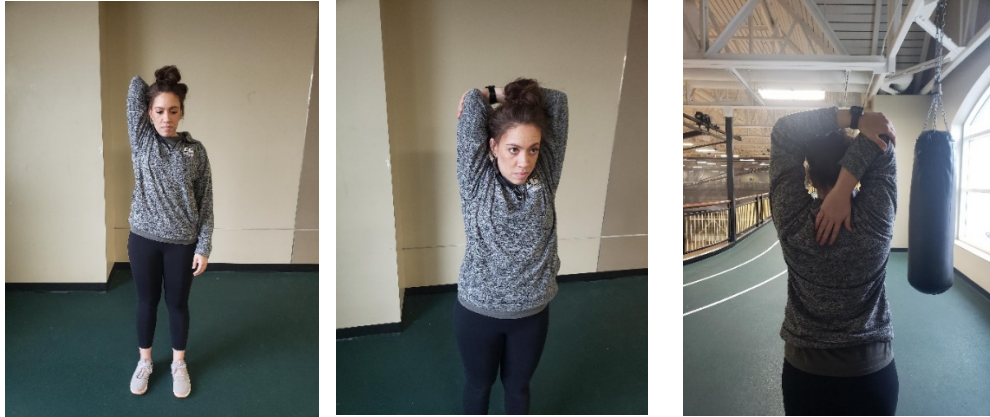


Benefits: Improves the flexibility of the inner thigh muscles, groin, and hips. Releases tight hips.

How to: The starting position for this stretch will be seated on the floor with the soles of the feet touching each other. Keeping an elongated spine with your shoulders back place the hands on your ankles and with the help of your arms press your knees towards the floor. Once you can feel the stretch, hold for the designated time on calendar. Bringing the feet in closer to the body will make this stretch more intense.

Week 3 – Upper Body Stretches

Stretch: Overhead Tricep Stretch



Benefits: Stretching out the tricep and deltoid muscles helps elbow extension and flexibility as well as stabilizes the shoulder. When the triceps and biceps work together, you can create the most strong forearm movements.

How to: Stand with feet hip-width distance apart or sit down on the floor. Reach your right arm to the ceiling and keep your shoulder down (away from your ears). Bending at the elbow, let your right hand drop to the middle of your back, palm facing your back. Reach your left hand to the ceiling and place your fingers on your right arm, just above the elbow. Apply light pressure to deepen the stretch. Hold for the appropriate time noted on calendar and then switch sides.

Stretch: Straight Arm Wall Stretch



Benefits: Relieves tightness in your shoulders, pecs, and subscapularis; opens your chest.

How to: Stand with your right shoulder next to the wall about a foot away. Reach your right arm back behind you and place your hand palm down on the wall so that it is in line with your shoulder. Take a step closer to the wall to feel a stretch through your right shoulder and chest; then, slightly rotate your chest outward to feel the stretch intensify. Hold for the appropriate time noted on calendar and then switch sides.

Stretch: Cross-Body Shoulder Stretch



Benefits: Improves ability to reach behind your back and increases range of motion in your shoulders, as well as stretches your chest muscles.

How to: Start standing or sitting tall. Grab one arm above your elbow with your opposite hand, and pull it across your body toward your chest until you feel a stretch in your shoulder. Make sure to keep your elbow below shoulder height. Hold for the appropriate time noted on calendar and then switch sides.

Week 3 – Lower Body Stretches

Stretch: Standing Hamstring Stretch / Toe Touch



Benefits: Stretching your hamstrings is important and allows you to have more mobility of the pelvis, which can help relieve low-back pressure. This also relieves any tightness you may be feeling in your hamstrings.

How to: Start by standing with your feet hip-width distance apart. Lower your hands to try to meet your toes; go as far as you can until you feel the stretch uncomfortably but NOT painfully. Hold for the appropriate time noted on calendar.

Stretch: Lateral Lunge Stretch



Benefits: Helps increase flexibility and strengthens your thigh muscles; this can be a great hip-opening exercise as well as a core strengthener. This is very popular in yoga classes.

How to: Start with your feet together and hands on or by your hips. Take a big step out (about 2 feet) to one side. The lower you dip into this stretch, the more you should feel it across your inner thigh. You can rest your hand on your thigh or dive deeper and reach your hands to the ground. Hold for the appropriate time noted on calendar and then switch sides.

Stretch: Lying Quad Stretch



Benefits: Stretching your quads can help you keep your balance, build muscle, lift weights safely, and build stamina for longer runs. Your quads can easily suffer from injury if not stretched properly!

How to: First, lay on your stomach, propping your forehead on your hands. Pull your left foot forward towards your bottom and then you can slightly bend your left knee to stabilize yourself. Hold on to your ankle for the appropriate amount of time on the calendar, before returning to starting position to begin the stretch on the other quad. The more you pull your ankle towards your bottom the more stretch you will get in your quad.

References:

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