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stretching workout

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Suzanne Martin PT, DPT





>> **15** minute

stretching workout

Suzanne Martin P.T., D.P.T.





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author foreword



Here it is! Thanks to all of you who enjoyed my first Stretching book, and especially, to all of you who contacted me to request more Stretching and succeeded in exerting your influence in spurring the production of this book. Here are four themes with stretches that have been a part of my regimen for years. A special welcome to those of you new to stretching. May you become a lifelong convert!

Stretching is an integral part of body maintenance, as essential as brushing your teeth. Please don't be misled into thinking of it as a competitive sport, where more is better. This is not the case. Stretching is for everyone, male or female, naturally flexible or uncomfortably stiff. Correct stretching changes how your whole body looks, as well as providing pain relief and reducing stress.

Keep your mind open. Some of the instructions given may seem prescriptive, but that is because the effectiveness of the stretches lies in the set-up. Many people spend years in the gym, yet never seem to gain results. They don't pay attention to their set-up.

Look hard at the pictures and tips. The explanations will help you to organize the exercise concepts in your mind, which will help you to organize the efforts in your body to gain the greatest effect. This may take time, so be patient.

The stretches will reveal where your body needs help.

Observe and compare one side of your body to the other. Can you feel both sides “organizing themselves” into the movement or position? Is any body part talking to you? Please remember that our supple models are only demonstrators. Follow the instructions, mimic the basic shapes, and understand the cues. Then take the movements farther. Internalize them until you can feel every bone inside your body. Learn to compare the way your body stretches today to the way it stretched yesterday. Don’t compare it with the model’s body.

Learn to see your body as it is. The famous composer Stravinsky once said that once he knew his limitations, then he could become creative. Until we see our bodies as they really are, and respect their individuality, we won’t bring about change.

Take the challenge. Construct a new, improved you. These simple exercises hold a key to your body’s potential. Permanent change happens one little increment at a time. Each 15-minute segment will bring you closer to a more wonderful you. Enjoy.

Dr. Suzanne Martin

>> how to use this book

Stretch toward a new you! Each of the four programs in this book uses stretching to develop different aspects of your body. Think of those aspects like the facets of a diamond, honed with precision by the diamond cutter so each one sparkles and makes a glorious whole.

This book shows you how to transform your body—and your life—through stretching. Each stretch can stand by itself, but when done in sequence, you will experience a powerful cumulative effect. To start, read the introduction to each program to get an idea of its theme. Then watch the demonstration on the DVD, which demonstrates all four programs and is designed to be used with the book. As you watch, page references to the book flash up on the screen. Refer to these for more detailed instruction.

Next, try the program for yourself, then read the FAQs pages and annotations, and study the “feel-it-here” patches on the exercise pages to learn more and make the moves more your own.

Certain stretches will be harder for some people than for others, depending upon experience and body type. Remember, there’s always an easier way to get into a harder move, so use the modification suggestions in the FAQs pages and on pp116–117. Remember, too, that you need to do a variety of motions in many different planes in order to identify weak links in your body.

There’s no such thing as an easy exercise. Any exercise or stretch, however simple it may seem, brings greater benefits the more mindfully you do it.

The gatefolds

The gatefolds help you see each stretch sequence as a whole. Once you’ve watched the DVD, and examined the modifications and tips for each exercise, the gatefold will help reinforce the sense of the sequence and gives you a quick at-a-glance

reference. More importantly, when working without the DVD, you can also use the gatefold to prolong a stretch and linger from stretch to stretch, embellishing and savoring each as times permits.

Safety issues

Be sure to get permission from your healthcare provider prior to beginning a new exercise program. The advice and exercises are not intended to be a substitute for individual medical help.



At-a-glance gatefolds demonstrate the flow of each program, providing a quick reference so you can perform a neat, succinct, 15-minute sequence.

>> articulating hurdler lat stretch

9 Hurdler lat stretch Come to a sitting position with both legs comfortably out to the sides. Tuck one foot in toward the groin and reach both hands over toward the extended leg. Sit evenly on your sitbones. Hold wherever it feels comfortable, either at the knee or lower down if you can. Bring both shoulders parallel to the floor. Breathe in, round into your back, and lower your head. Resist the stretch by holding firmly with the hands, on the outside of the leg.

10 Exhale, pull forward with your hands, round the back even more, and look toward your navel. Repeat 2 more times, then release your hands, roll your shoulders, and repeat on the other side.

>> posture stretch

>> energizing balance point stretch

11 Balance point stretch Remain sitting. Bend your knees, slide a hand underneath each thigh, and lift your feet off the floor, finding your point of balance. You will probably need to lean back a little. Use padding underneath your bottom if you need it. Roll your shoulder blades down the back and pull with your arms to hold yourself up. Inhale and bow your head, rounding your back.

12 Squeeze your sitbones together and pull down on your arms. Sit tall and lift your groin muscles toward your head (see p17). Repeat 5 more times, breathing in as you round, and exhaling as you sit tall.

>> posture stretch

“Feel-it-here” patches in some of the illustrations to the steps reveal the particular areas of your body that the stretch is working on—and where you are most likely to feel the benefits.

annotations provide extra cues, tips, and insights

the gatefold shows all the exercises in the program



>> defining the stretch

Welcome to the world of stretching. Not only will you come across many stretches, you will also find many types of stretches. Forget all those preconceived notions about the value of holding a stretch for an indefinite amount of time. Let these stretches move you.

There's more than one way to stretch. That's because there's more to it than simply stretching muscles. Arteries, veins, and nerves that supply the muscles are involved, too. What is also important is the stretch of the fascia—the connective tissue that permeates the whole body and wraps around the muscles and holds them close to the skeleton.

Think of it as a biomechanical “architecture.” The bones are the scaffolding and the fascia is the bricks and mortar that support the volume of the structure. The fascia adapts to its environment. If you were put into a small closet and forced to sit in a crouched position for days on end, over time your body would attempt to shrink to fit into the extreme environment. The fascia does the same.

Compensating for bad habits

Our bodies are remarkably forgiving because we still function, even with poor posture—rounded shoulders and a forward head, or a protruding belly or collapsing ankles. The body compensates for weaknesses or faulty habits, but the compensations become “solidified,” altering the patterns of our fascia and muscles. For this reason, we need different types of stretching to reverse any tightening to which our body has become accustomed.

Stretching strategies

We also need different stretches to address the properties of the various parts of our body. Moving stretches where, for instance, the head is rotating, the knee is bending, or the arm is circling, tend to

>> types of stretching

- **Re-coordination stretches** increase range by changing repetitive motor patterns caused by right or left dominance.
- **Reciprocal stretches** use the natural shortening and lengthening effect on either side of a joint to create more stretch.
- **Fascial stretches** focus on the fascia and help to balance muscle connections; they are particularly effective for opening and stretching the torso.

be re-coordination stretches. They help to break up the body patterns we develop from being right- or left-handed, as well the patterns that come from other reoccurring motions. Merely changing the direction of those familiar patterns can significantly increase our range of motion.

Another stretching strategy has to do with stretching muscles on the opposite side of joints. This is called reciprocal stretching. For instance, when you bend your elbow, the muscles on the front side of the joint—the biceps—shorten, and those on the other side—the triceps—have to lengthen to allow the motion. Using reciprocal stretching techniques automatically relaxes the lengthening side, allowing those muscles to stretch.

Stretching the fascia

Other types of stretches work on stretching the fascia in several ways. Stretching the spine using a breathing and rippling action helps to stretch the torso from horizontal segment to horizontal segment. Another fascial stretch works on stretching the muscle connection chain that runs from the waist, down the back of the leg, and into the foot (see pp12–13). This program also includes

some stretches specifically designed to glide the arm and leg nerves in their sheaths, which allows greater ease of motion. The details make the difference; read the instructions carefully to find the precision that will give you your best stretch.

The devil's in the detail. Find the precision you need for each stretch by studying the demonstrations and imagining the cues.



>> muscle connections

Proper positioning of the arms, legs, and head helps us to physically find the link between muscle and connective tissue. Using focus and intent when we line these extremities up with the torso gives us a powerful tool for changing body posture and developing litheness.

The science of biomechanics identifies various structural body connections and physical forces that are involved in body function. In order to devise appropriate exercises, it is necessary to use our knowledge of the nature of our body parts (how plastic, or changeable, the various components are) to create the effect we need. Three important structural connections in the body that we have to consider are the “X” model, the inner unit, and the lateral system.

The “X” model

The “X” model shows the connection between what is going on externally and the inner unit (see below). It shows how the limbs are connected with each other and how these connections pass right through the inner unit. Think deep; think three-dimensional. The right arm, for example, is connected to the left leg and vice versa. The positioning of the head, which can weigh up to 15 pounds (6.8kg), is also important. Tipping it in any direction activates an intricate system of overlapping muscles that bind the head into the trunk yet allow a marvelous telescoping range to the neck.

The inner unit

Various groups of muscles form the inner unit. These are the muscles at the bottom of the torso (the pelvic floor), the deep abdominal muscles, the transverse abdominals at the sides of the abdomen, the deep low-back muscles, the multifidi (a group

>> pulling it all together

- **Coordination** between opposing limbs and the trunk is demonstrated by the “X” model concept.
- **Precision** in stretching is created by achieving stabilization of the inner unit, which provides a firm foundation.
- **Elongation of the lateral system** promotes symmetry and balance.

of muscles either side of the spine), and the muscles deep inside the rib cage (the diaphragm).

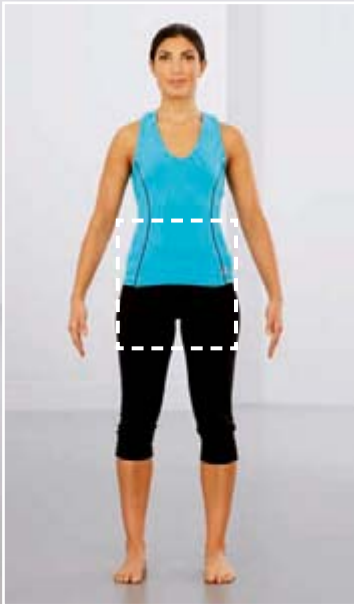
Working the muscles of the inner unit correctly—with good form—promotes low-back and pelvic health. The exercise instructions also help you to use the inner unit as a stabilizing foundation, giving more precision when you stretch the external parts.

The lateral system

The lateral system connects the muscles and fascia (see p10) that run down the sides of the body. Think of it as a long road running from the triceps in the upper arm, past the armpit, down the side of the ribs and waist, extending down the side of the leg past the thigh and shin, and ending at the side of the foot. This lateral system is often overlooked, but opening it through stretching is key to balancing the body and improving posture.



The “X” model shows the link between what goes on internally and externally. Opposite sides of the body criss-cross, attaching the limbs and head to the torso.



The inner unit is the foundation of our body. It houses our center of gravity. Anchoring this area provides a counterbalance to, and increased effectiveness for, each stretch.

Attention to stretching the lateral system is a major key in balancing the body. Our right- or left-handed dominance presents a challenge when it comes to achieving optimal posture.



The lateral system extends from the triceps in the arm to the side of the foot.

>> flexibility and posture

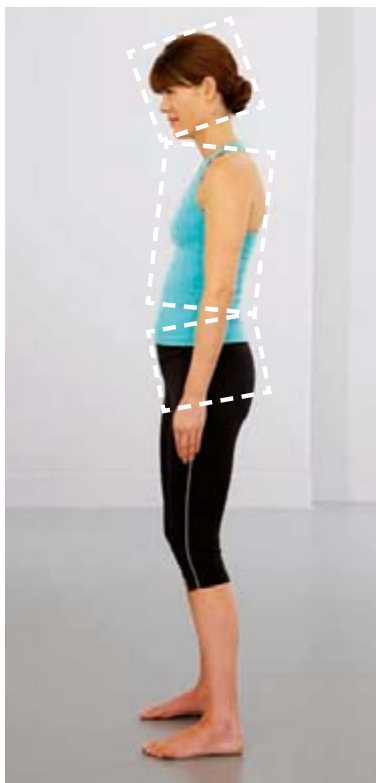
Genetics dictate how flexible you are and also your postural body type. Stiffness and over-flexibility both cause aches, pains, and difficulty in day-to-day activities. Explore your flexibility with these easy tests, and strive to find your best neutral posture.

Gravity has a greater impact upon our posture when we are upright in sitting or standing. If we give in to it, the “segments” of our body collapse (see below left). The result is that our muscles are out of balance and our joints are misaligned.

Stretching counterbalances this and helps you develop a good neutral posture. You start by using good form and working the muscles of the inner

unit (see p12). This helps you stretch the chest and shorten the upper back muscles, open the low back and engage the abs, as well as stretch the front of the hips and thighs, and the calves.

Practicing sitting and standing tall also solidifies our intent to push vertically upward against the force of gravity. The beauty of this formula is that it applies to all body types and levels of flexibility.

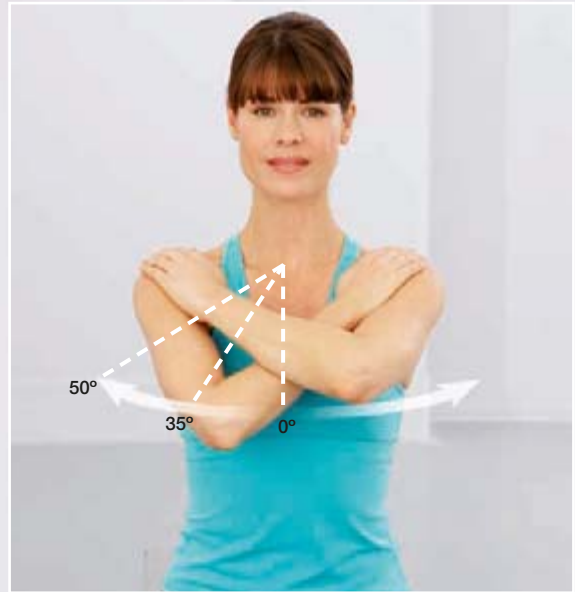


Gravity breaks us into unbalanced segments (far left). The head falls forward. The chest shortens and sinks, and the upper back rounds. The low back tightens and collapses, and the abdomen protrudes. The front of the thighs and hips tighten, while the hip extensors slacken. Body weight lists back on the heels, shortening the calves.

The goal is to balance the segments and achieve neutral posture, with a straight line running from the head through the pelvis (left). Note especially how the weight of the heavy head is now balanced directly over the pelvis, which houses our center of gravity. This alignment puts the least amount of strain on the spine as well as the other joints in the body.



Test the mobility of your shoulders and upper back. Lie on the floor with your arms bent and your forearms parallel with the sides of your head. Your muscles are over-tight if your head and forearms do not touch the floor.



Test the mobility of your spine, rib cage, and neck.

From a seated position, cross your arms, put each hand on the opposite shoulder, and rotate your torso. Note how far you can go. Anything less than 35° indicates that your muscles are over-tight. Being right-handed or left-handed affects how far you can rotate.



Test the mobility of your hips. Lie on your back and raise first one leg, then the other. If you can only raise your leg to a 70° angle or less, it indicates over-tightness of your muscles at the back of your leg and hip. Being able to lift each leg to a 90° angle helps prevent low-back pain when sitting. It also prevents walking with an unbalanced gait, which causes leg and back problems. Raising your leg to a 120° angle indicates an exceptional degree of mobility.

>> imagery as a tool

Use imagery as a tool to help create precision and a sense of the inner layers of your body in your stretches. Connecting everyday concepts to the exercises gives your stretches an effective edge. Strive to internalize the cues. They hold the key to true physical transformation.

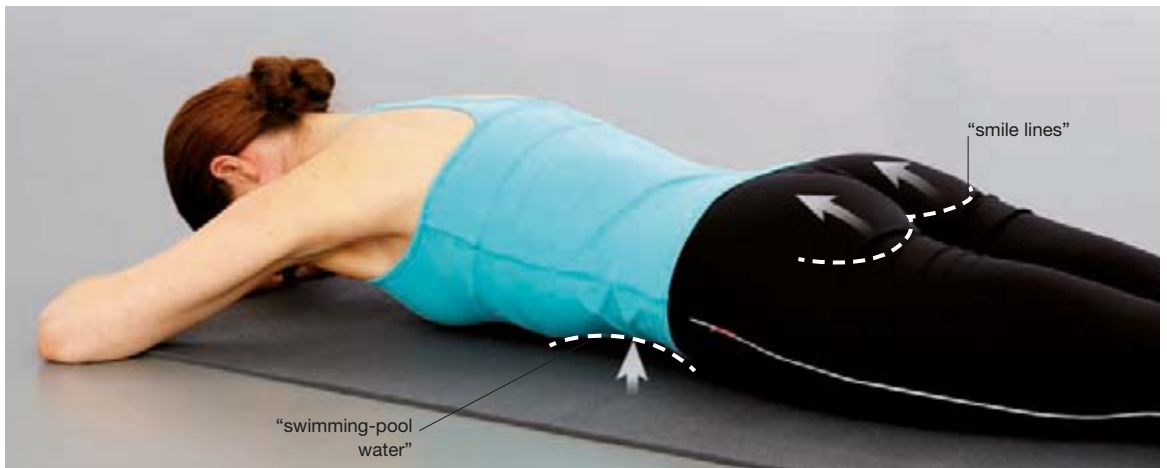
Actors, musicians, and dancers use imagery to help them “act out” their message. Children play imaginary roles in imaginary settings to prepare for adult life. As adults, we can employ imagery to help us make our exercise more effective.

The exercise programs in this book contain some imagery cues that ask you to use your imagination. Focus on them to help coordinate your muscles and access the deeper connections of your body. For example, “Lift the imaginary swimming-pool water” asks you to press upward in the abdomen when you’re lying on your front. Mention of “smile lines” is a cue for you to hold your hips in true extension when lying down, and give you the range of motion you need to achieve a neutral pelvis. When you get it right, two arcs separate the buttocks from the upper thighs or hamstrings (see below).

By training these deeper muscles to engage as you perform your stretching exercises, you also train them to engage when you carry out your everyday activities. Although some images apply to certain body positions, such as finding the smile lines while lying on your front, you can also relate to them in other positions. In other words, you can find your smile lines when you’re standing, too. They can help you find your neutral posture (see p14).

The imagery I use is truly the key to taking your exercise life into your daily life. Study the pictures in the exercises on these two pages, and start a lifelong habit of using your body more completely.

Imagining water pushing up against the abdomen deepens abdominal connections. Visualizing “smile lines” stabilizes the pelvis and brings precision into hip stretches.





Preserve your natural low-back curve by sitting forward on your sitbones. Simultaneously pull the navel to the spine to sandwich the waist with a corset of muscles.

Coordinate the stretch between your head and legs. Reach your head out of the collarbones, like a turtle reaching its head out of a shell. At the same time, balance and reach out through the top foot.

Lift the groin. The floor of the pelvis should be buoyed upward like the air filling a parachute. Feel the lift, like an elevator ascending up the spine toward the head.





15 minute

wake up the stretch >>

Start to master your stretch

Think three-dimensionally

Focus on body sensations

Breathe smoothly and deeply



>> wake up the stretch

Your stretch journey starts with a sequence that creates suppleness and wakes up your stretch. No matter what your level, as you stretch your whole body, you'll find the fluid motion of this sequence as slinky as a long cat yawn. Try to imagine that you're "joining the dots" as you weave your way through each and every movement.

Stretching is a skill that everyone can master. This sequence emphasizes the various techniques you'll need and the sensory elements of stretch that together will help to make your stretch possible. Being able to identify muscle tone is a crucial first step. Next, learning to stabilize one part of the body while another moves away from the stabilizing part is key to the effectiveness of a lengthening stretch. Breathing into tight body areas such as the back of the rib cage demands discipline and focus. Loosening and circling motions help to oil the joints and loosen restrictive connective tissue, thus prompting muscles to expand and contract. Re-coordination exercises (see p10) make new ranges of motion a possibility for everyone.

The exercises

Feel as much of your body as you can in the Hand pull. Memorize this muscular feeling and strive to carry that feeling into the rest of the sequence. Make the Elbow circles as sensory and luscious as if you were moving through a pool of honey. Direct the flow of your breath very specifically into any tight parts of the diaphragm. This exercise may feel difficult at first, but it can give you a very satisfying sense of relaxation.

The seated exercises may seem easy, but use the surface and structure of the chair to explore your orientation in space. Notice the relationship of your hip, rib, head, arm, and leg placements.

>> tips for wake up the stretch

- **Internalize your stretches** by giving as much detailed focus to your body sensations as possible.
- **Try to imagine** the infrastructure—the skeletal part that is moving—such as your arms moving against your upper torso.
- **Work to identify** which parts are anchoring and which parts are moving.
- **Strive to feel the entire path of the motion**, not just the end points.
- **Breathe in long, flowing, time-released breaths**, as suggested by the guide music; be sure not to hold your breath.

The physical boundary of the chair not only provides landmarks so you can judge how far a stretch is moving, it can also give you a sense of your deep muscles, which can help if you feel your movement is restricted. Sitting on a firm surface is also a sneaky way to feel some input up into your sitbones. This pressure gives a neurological stimulus to your "righting" reflex, which helps you to lengthen up against gravity. The Seated cross-leg

twist and Shoulder wedge also show you how to press one body part against another to increase the stretch, as well as adding a strengthening element to your stretches.

On the other end of the scale are the Shoulder ovals. They demonstrate an instance where learning to respect a joint's boundary is of great importance, since neck, arms, and shoulders tend to be more sensitive to injury thanks to their potential for extreme movement. The Shoulder ovals also provide a superb nerve stretch and glide—a nerve glide being a movement that creates frictionless motion of the nerve. This, ultimately, will increase the range of movement of the whole of your upper body.

Simple stretching positions while sitting can bring about big changes when you perform them with coordination, precision, and intent.



>> energizing hand pull



1 Hand pull Stand with your hands by your hips, feet just past shoulder-width apart, and toes firmly planted into the floor. Feel as if your legs are pressing outward. Lift your groin muscles toward the head (see p17) and firm your hips. Slowly exhale as you open your arms to the sides, turning your palms forward.



2 Clasp your hands overhead in an “O” shape, then pull on the hands as if you are trying to pull them apart. Feel as if you are pulling your hands and feet away from each other as you take 2 long breaths. Keep the shape as you exhale and relax for 2 more breaths. Repeat the pull, then relax.



>> limbering elbow circles



3 Elbow circles Bring your feet and inner thighs completely together and place your hands at your hips, with your palms facing forward. Inhale, and fold your elbows to take your fingertips to your shoulders, pointing the elbows forward.



4 Exhale, lift the elbows, and smoothly circle the hands up and diagonally behind you. Repeat 3 more times.



>> articulating rib breath



5 Rib breath Keep your legs firmly together as you clasp your hands on the front of your rib cage and try to pinch the crest of the rib cage together. Lift your groin muscles toward the head and stand tall. Then inhale and bring the elbows forward, depressing your chest and breathing into the back of the rib cage.

round the back



6 Reverse the movement. Exhale, open the chest, lengthen up through your head, and look diagonally upward. Allow your elbows to come backward. Repeat 2 more times, inhaling as you bring the elbows forward, and exhaling as you open the chest. Release your hands and shake them gently to release any tension in them.

feel it here



press the ankles together

>> coordinating side reach



7 Side reach Keep your legs in the same position as you firm your hips and lift your abs up and into the spine. Inhale and reach one arm up and the other down, with palms facing in toward your body.



reach up

8

Intensify the stretch by bending the knee slightly on the side of the raised hand and by looking down toward the lower hand. Feel as if someone is pulling your middle finger to the ceiling. Then exhale, straighten the knee, and slowly turn your face forward. Repeat, then change sides and repeat 2 times on the other side. Let your arm come down and relax.

look down

bend the
knee



>> lengthening lift & bow



9 Lift & bow Sit on the edge of a chair with your feet hip-width apart. Feel your sitbones pressing equally on the seat. Sit tall, lift your groin muscles toward your head, then hold onto one thigh and lift the knee toward the ceiling. Inhale, then lift up into your waist and bow your head toward your knee.



10 Exhale and reverse, lifting your chest and face diagonally up toward the ceiling. Repeat 2 more times, inhaling as you bow, and exhaling as you lift. Lower the foot to the floor and repeat on the other side.



>> opening seated cat

11 Seated cat Remain sitting toward the edge of your seat. Extend one foot out on the floor in front of you, keeping the knee a little bent, and pressing the sole and big toe of the foot firmly on the floor. Place your hands on the same thigh. Inhale as you round your back.



12 Exhale and reverse the curve. Start from the lower back, and move through the middle and upper back with a ripple effect to lift the chest and face diagonally toward the ceiling. Inhale, round and repeat, then repeat the whole stretch on the other side. Roll your shoulders and release.



>> **balancing** seated cross-leg twist



13 Seated cross-leg twist
 Remain seated, cross one foot on top of the opposite thigh, and hold onto your ankle with the other hand. Place the same hand as your crossed leg on your hip. Inhale, lift your groin muscles toward the head, lengthen your spine, and bow your head toward your knee.



14 Exhale, lift your chest, and turn your torso toward your crossed leg. Look past your shoulder. Repeat 2 more times, inhaling as you bow and exhaling as you lift, then repeat 3 times on the other side. Slowly release the leg, come out of the position, and gently move your back to release any tension.



>> elongating shoulder wedge

15 Shoulder wedge Still seated, place your feet shoulder-width apart. Pull your navel to your spine (see p17) and reach over to the floor. Place one hand on your ankle in between your thighs. Place the other arm outside the leg, then raise that arm as if you were pulling an imaginary thread to the ceiling. Look toward your raised hand.

feel it here

feel it here

press the knee against the arm

16 Exhale, keep your arm lifted, and consciously rotate your neck as you look down. Repeat 2 more times, inhaling as you look up, and exhaling as you look down. Bring the arm down and repeat 3 times on the other side. Roll to sit up. Take a deep breath, and relax.

keep lifting

>> **coordinating** alligator/cat

17 Alligator/Cat Go onto your hands and knees. Lengthen your back so it is parallel to the floor, like a table top, then inhale, round your back, tuck your tailbone in, and look toward your navel.



18 Exhale, lengthen your back, then sway your hips and head toward each other. Repeat on the other side, always inhaling as you round your back and exhaling as you take your hips and head toward each other. Repeat 1 more time each side.



>> opening arm fans



19 Arm fans Lie on one side, bend your legs, and lengthen your groin muscles toward your head. Pull your navel to your spine, then reach your arms along the floor, bringing the palms of your hands together in front of your face. Focus your eyes on your top hand as you raise it toward the ceiling, creating a rainbow shape.



20 Continue moving the arm and reach behind you to the floor, allowing your shoulders and torso to rotate with the arm. Try not to move your knees. Exhale, then reach up with the hand as you reverse, “painting the ceiling” with your fingertips until your hands are together again. Repeat 2 more times, inhaling as you open the arm, exhaling as you bring the palms together again. Roll over to the other side and repeat.



>> powering modified cobra

21 Modified cobra Go onto your stomach, firm and tighten your hips, and feel the smile lines (see p16) between your glutes and your hamstrings. Lift the groin muscles toward the head. Feel the imaginary swimming-pool water lifting your abdomen off the floor (see p16). Reach your hands out onto the floor in front of you.



22 Inhale as you drag your hands along the floor toward your shoulders, keeping the abdomen tight and lifting your front body so your ribs come off the floor. Exhale, slide the arms out in front of you, and take your face back to the floor. Repeat, then relax and breathe normally.



>> lengthening shoulder ovals



23 **Shoulder ovals** Tighten the waist, lift the hips, and come up to a perfect hands and knees position. Point the fingers of the hands in toward each other, then inhale and reach one shoulder down toward the opposite hand.



24 Sweep the chest across the floor, past center toward the other hand, then exhale and continue circling in the same direction as you round your back. Your shoulders should be describing an oval in space. Keep going in the same direction for 2 more ovals, then change direction and reverse for 2 more ovals.





wake up the stretch





15

minute **summary**

wake up the stretch at a glance



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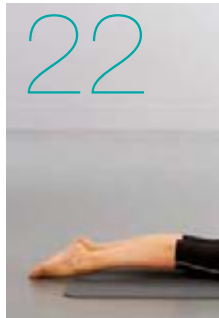
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▲ **Powering** Modified



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>> wake up the stretch FAQs

The wake up the stretch program is excellent for beginners as well as for someone looking for a lighter, more gentle stretch. During this first program, learn to create focus by coordinating inner and outer muscles through the use of the cues and imagery.

>> How is the Hand pull a stretch?

This overhead pull is a sneaky way to stretch the sides of the torso, especially around the armpits, as well as stretching the sides of the hips and legs. Some people will not be able even to reach their hands together in an overhead position, so this exercise makes a great starting point. It's possible that one half of your pelvis is tighter than the other. As you push the legs away from each other, you are beginning to equalize each side, balancing right with left.

>> In the Rib breath exercise, it seems as if nothing is moving. What can I do?

You have to have faith that something is happening. The deep connective tissue and the big domelike breathing muscle, the diaphragm, tend to be tight in the back of the rib cage on most people. It's a lot easier to see movement in the front part. Try coughing or sniffing repetitively; feel the action of the diaphragm and ribs in the front. It's anatomically not possible to have a great deal of motion in the back, but in this exercise we begin by cinching the front of the dome, which forces the back to stretch.

>> How do I know I'm doing the Side reach correctly?

First be sure you are following the instructions correctly. You have to pull upward very strongly with the armpit, arm, and hand while you bend your knee. It's not going to be a comfortable feeling once you add the turn of the head. The purpose of this exercise is to start opening the rib cage, neck, and shoulders. This is a very dense area and it's hard to tease apart the separate parts.

>> **When I'm sitting, I can barely lift my knee toward my head in Lift & bow, but the model's knee is almost touching. Am I still stretching?**

Absolutely. The important part of this stretch is the lengthening and softening of the spine. I jokingly call this "marinating" the spine. Moving the head up and down also helps to move the spinal cord, which is healthy for the nervous system. Think of it as flossing your nerves. They need to stretch and glide, too.

>> **The model in the Modified cobra is getting way more off of the floor than I am. Does it matter?**

Again, less can be more in this instance, too. Intent goes a long way when we are meeting the boundaries of our limitations. The whole idea is to find out how far you can go in a certain direction. Honor that limitation; don't force it. But meet the boundary, watch the model, and think of the direction of the motion, not so much the endpoint.

>> **The Shoulder ovals are confusing. How do I start?**

This is an extremely effective exercise for the nerves of the arms and neck. Many people don't realize how much restriction they have in their shoulders until they develop a problem. So persist. Start slow. Follow the exact instructions. Sometimes it's helpful to brace your hands on a table and start there first to get the idea of the flow of the movement. Precision is best, but sometimes you just have to gyrate a bit first.

>> **My back doesn't make a round shape like the model's in the Alligator/Cat. What should I do?**

Have faith. Rome wasn't built in a day. Just by attempting the exercise and imagining the shapes you will begin, little by little, to loosen up your back. After just a few weeks, you'll notice your back will feel better and you'll be able to bend and move more easily in everyday life.



15 minute



posture stretch >>

Find your center
Elongate your waist
Extend up against
the force of gravity

>> posture stretch

We all desire healthy posture. Although we live in an imperfect world, nearly perfect posture can be achieved by methodically balancing our bodies against gravity's pull. Where the body leads, the mind goes. Improving posture will uplift your outlook on life as well as giving you confidence and endurance against everyday stresses.

Stretching for healthy posture means fighting against the pull of gravity. If we do not work against gravity's pull, then the longer we live, the more bent and deformed we become. A typical gravitational pull creates a forward-jutting chin, a tight chest, and rounded shoulders. Carrying on down the body, the abdomen becomes lax and the low back becomes tighter. A domino effect continues on into the legs, shortening the front of the thighs and creating a loose area around the glutes. The end-result is an off-center line, with tight calves causing the body weight to fall back into the heels (see p14). It's no wonder joints wear out before their time. We're all living longer, so our joints—which are a key factor in our quality of life—are important to us. The value of healthy posture cannot be stressed too much. Not only do we achieve a pleasing cosmetic effect by standing upright, we also increase our vitality, since standing well promotes optimal lung capacity, which provides more oxygen for the brain to function well.

The exercises

The Posture stretch sequence follows a muscle-balancing formula as well as reinforcing the neurodevelopmental sequence—in other words, the basic movement patterns that get an infant from lying down to standing and walking. The Posture stretch sequence uses all the positions that infants must achieve on their journey to walking.

>> tips for posture stretch

- **Focus on the ultimate goal** of elongating your entire body in every exercise.
- **Notice how each exercise builds** toward firm, upright posture.
- **Modify when needed.** Be sensible and use extra padding under the knees if they are tender.
- **Enhance balance** by focusing your eyes on a fixed object or by holding onto furniture, if necessary.
- **In the final standing exercise,** focus first on stretching out and elongating your waist as you lengthen your ribs up and off the pelvis; locate your head weight over the center of gravity in the pelvic bowl.

Starting with exercises lying on the back, trunk control is developed which enables optimum control of the limbs. Pay special attention to the various parts of the front of the trunk in the Elongations. Notice how the “W’s” exercise straightens and elongates you, combating the typical fetal curling position many adopt when

asleep. Next, the Hurdler lat stretch balances both sides of the back of the waist. The Balance point stretch literally pushes the trunk and head up against gravity. Most of us don't notice how our back is pulling us down because our legs compensate, taking up most of the slack in the system. The Sidelying waist stretch stretches the deep muscles we use to stand and walk; be sure to pull the abdomen strongly up and into the spine to get the most benefit from this intense twist.

Progressing to kneeling on both knees usually shows us how tight the front of our thighs and hips can be. The Lunge opener prepares the body for full standing and evens out our walking pattern so that it is not lop-sided. Squatting and then alternating the motion by reaching the hips upward in the Round back squat gives balance and leg strength as well as stretch. The rolling-back motion of the Hanging stretch lets the body register the weight of the trunk and head above the waist. These body parts are heavy, and need to be placed precisely above the firm foundation of the lower body. Ending with a Top-to-toe stretch coalesces the whole body, helping you to stand tall against the ever-present force of gravity.

Kneeling positions help lengthen the front of the body, counteracting hip tightness from prolonged sitting and the slump and fatigue associated with prolonged standing.



>> centering elongations

- 1 Elongations** Lie on your back, with your legs hip-width apart. Reach your arms beyond your head on the floor and clasp your hands. Inhale and stretch your hands and feet away from each other. Simultaneously press your low back and ribs against the floor.



- 2** Exhale as you relax, then inhale and stretch again. Finally, exhale and relax one more time.



>> stabilizing “W’s”

3 “W’s” Stay on your back. Reach your arms out to the sides and bend your elbows to 90° with the backs of your hands and forearms toward the floor. If they don’t touch the floor, don’t force them. Inhale, then press the back of your head, forearms, shoulders, low back, and thighs into the floor.



4 Exhale and relax, releasing all the tension. Repeat by inhaling and pressing, and exhaling and releasing.



>> accentuating “C” stretch

5 “C” stretch Still lying on your back, reach your arms up beyond your head on the floor. Take one wrist and, keeping your shoulders against the floor, inhale and pull the wrist toward the opposite side, sliding your upper body slightly along the floor in the same direction.



6 At the same time, cross the leg opposite to the held wrist over the other leg, and slide your legs in the same direction. This adds an extra stretch and helps to make a letter “C” with your body. Stay, inhale, and tense your abdominal muscles, then exhale and lengthen into the “C.” Hold for 4 breath cycles. Lengthen and release, move back to center, and repeat on the other side. Thump the thighs to release the low back. Repeat on both sides, then thump the thighs one more time.



>> softening baby rocks

7 **Baby rocks** Remain on your back. Exhale, press your back against the floor, and slowly slide your feet toward your hips. Lift your feet, one at a time, and hold onto them from outside your legs, keeping your knees bent. If you can't reach your feet, hold onto your shins.



feel it here

8 Inhale, pull one knee down toward the floor, and rock toward that side. Then, exhale and release to return to center. Repeat, rocking to the other side, then repeat for 2 more sets.



keep the head on the floor

>> articulating hurdler lat stretch



9 Hurdler lat stretch Come to a sitting position with both legs comfortably out to the sides. Tuck one foot in toward the groin and reach both hands over toward the extended leg. Sit evenly on your sitbones. Hold wherever it feels comfortable, either at the knee or lower down if you can. Bring both shoulders parallel to the floor. Breathe in, round into your back, and lower your head. Resist the stretch by holding firmly with the hands, on the outside of the leg.

tuck the
pelvis under



10 Exhale, pull forward with your hands, round the back even more, and look toward your navel. Repeat 2 more times, then release your hands, roll your shoulders, and repeat on the other side.

feel it here

pull

press the calf down



>> energizing balance point stretch



- 11 Balance point stretch** Remain sitting. Bend your knees, slide a hand underneath each thigh, and lift your feet off the floor, finding your point of balance. You will probably need to lean back a little. Use padding underneath your bottom if you need it. Roll your shoulder blades down the back and pull with your arms to hold yourself up. Inhale and bow your head, rounding your back.

feel it here



- 12** Squeeze your sitbones together and pull down on your arms. Sit tall and lift your groin muscles toward your head (see p17). Repeat 5 more times, breathing in as you round, and exhaling as you sit tall.

pull and lift



>> elongating sidelying waist stretch



13 Sidelying waist stretch Lie on your side with your torso and legs in a straight line, feet pointed. Prop yourself up on your hands, one hand a little behind you. Lift your groin muscles toward your head, and lift your ears toward the ceiling. Inhale, lifting your abs as you rotate the hips forward. Look toward your feet.



14 Exhale. Tighten and firm the hips as you roll them backward. Repeat 2 more times, inhaling as you rotate the hips forward, and exhaling as you roll them back. Turn to the other side and repeat.



>> opening front body opener



15 Front body opener
 Kneel up, with your knees under your pelvis. Use padding underneath your knees if you need it. Tuck your pelvis under and press the hips forward. Find your smile lines (see p16). Reach your arms behind you and clasp your hands behind your back, without over-arching the back. Inhale, press your hips together, and squeeze your glutes. Lift your chest and stretch your hands behind you.



16 Exhale, relax your hands, and come back to center. Repeat another 2 times.



>> **coordinating** lunge opener

- 17 Lunge opener** Come onto your hands and knees. Reach one foot forward, take the other leg back, and lean onto the front leg. Lift the groin muscles toward the head and tuck the pelvis under. Clasp the hands and reach them behind your head, holding onto your skull with the heels of the hands. Inhale, open the elbows, and lift the chest.



- 18** Exhale. Bring the elbows to point to the front and down. Repeat, then take the other foot forward and repeat.



>> limbering round back squat



feel it here



take the feet in a "V"

19 Round back squat Come into a squatting position on the balls of your feet. Let your knees open and allow your heels to touch slightly and come off the floor. Bring your hips down toward your heels, then lean more into your hands, place your palms on the floor, and inhale as you lift the hips upward as far as you can. Keep your head down, heels up, and your knees slightly bent.

20 Take a long, slow exhalation as you round your back, tuck your hips in, and lower them toward the heels again, still keeping your head down. Repeat 2 more times.

tuck the tail

allow heels to lift



>> elongating hanging stretch



21 Hanging stretch
 Roll up to standing and place one foot ahead of the other, about your foot's distance and a hand-width apart. Hold onto something if you cannot keep your balance, otherwise fold your arms in front of you and hold onto your elbows. Firm the hips and pull your navel to your spine (see p17). Inhale, then tuck your chin under and round your upper back, allowing your head to hang.



22 Exhale, scoop deeper into your spine, and lower your head to hip-height as if you were going over an imaginary fence. Repeat 2 more times, then change legs and repeat on the other side.



>> centering top-to-toe stretch



23

Top-to-toe stretch

Roll up to standing. Bring your legs completely together, press the inner thighs together, and lift your groin muscles toward your head. Reach your arms sideways, then take them overhead. Clasp the thumbs and press the palms together. Keep reaching up through your arms, squeezing the head, and pressing down into your feet for 4 breath cycles.



squeeze the legs together

press the ankles together

24

Lower your arms and shake them gently to release the tension.

Repeat, then gently move your body to relax any tension.





posture stretch





15 minute **summary**

posture stretch at a glance

1



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Elongations,
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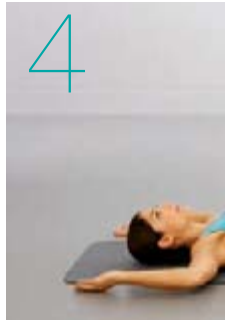
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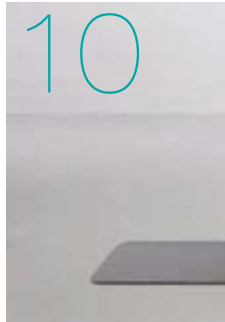
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▲ **Centering** Top-to-toe stretch, page 57



▲ **Centering** Top-to-toe stretch, page 57

>> posture stretch FAQs

The difference is in the details when it comes to developing and maintaining good posture. Take these tips to heart. Examine yourself in a mirror and learn to see the subtle nuances that cumulatively add up to a vibrant posture. After a while, you're sure to see the changes.

>> **What exactly is going on in my body in the Elongations?**

Although seemingly simple, the Elongations begin to stretch out every molecule of your body. Think of your body volumetrically, three-dimensionally. Imagine your torso is a cylinder, whose front is much more pliable than the back. Tightening the front helps to stretch out the tighter parts at the back. Elongating the whole body is just like stretching out a long roll of clay, but you have to soften the clay before you can stretch it.

>> **My head and arms don't touch the floor in the "W's." What should I do?**

Not to worry. Fold a towel and place it under your head. Then place pillows under each arm. It's common for people to start slightly off the floor in the "W's," partly because we rarely lie completely flat in bed at night. I often push away the pillows when I awaken, and then do my "W's" to start the day. It combats the contorted positions we sometimes assume during sleep.

>> **The "C" stretch seems hard to do. How can I tell I'm doing it correctly?**

Move the upper part of your body first. Then add the lower body. Be sure to feel the entire length of the "C," from the wrist all the way to the ankle. The "C" is so beneficial because it addresses the sides of the body, which are often neglected in more general stretching. Especially when working to achieve postural change, side stretches of the upper rib cage, armpit, waist, and the sides of the legs are necessary to acquire a straighter standing position, and to balance the right side of the body in relation to the left.

>> **The Sidelying waist stretch is hard to feel. How can I intensify it?**

Make sure you are lifting your groin muscles strongly toward your head. Press your hips forward. The side of the body nearest the floor is again making a long “C” shape. So work to make it as long as possible, reaching your bottom foot away from the ear on the same side. Increase the top curve of the “C” by lifting your uppermost ear toward the ceiling. Use the hands to twist your hips in relation to the shoulders.

>> **What do I do if I can’t straighten out my hips in the Front body opener?**

Don’t panic. There’s always another way. Kneel on padding if your knees are too sensitive. Usually a mat or folded towel works best. Sometimes pillows are worse because the knees dig into them. Next, squeeze your buttock cheeks together and tighten your glutes, to stretch the front of the hips. Still need help? Balance by holding onto a piece of furniture, press down on your hands, and lift your chest.

>> **How do I do the Hanging stretch if my back feels as if it’s moving in chunks?**

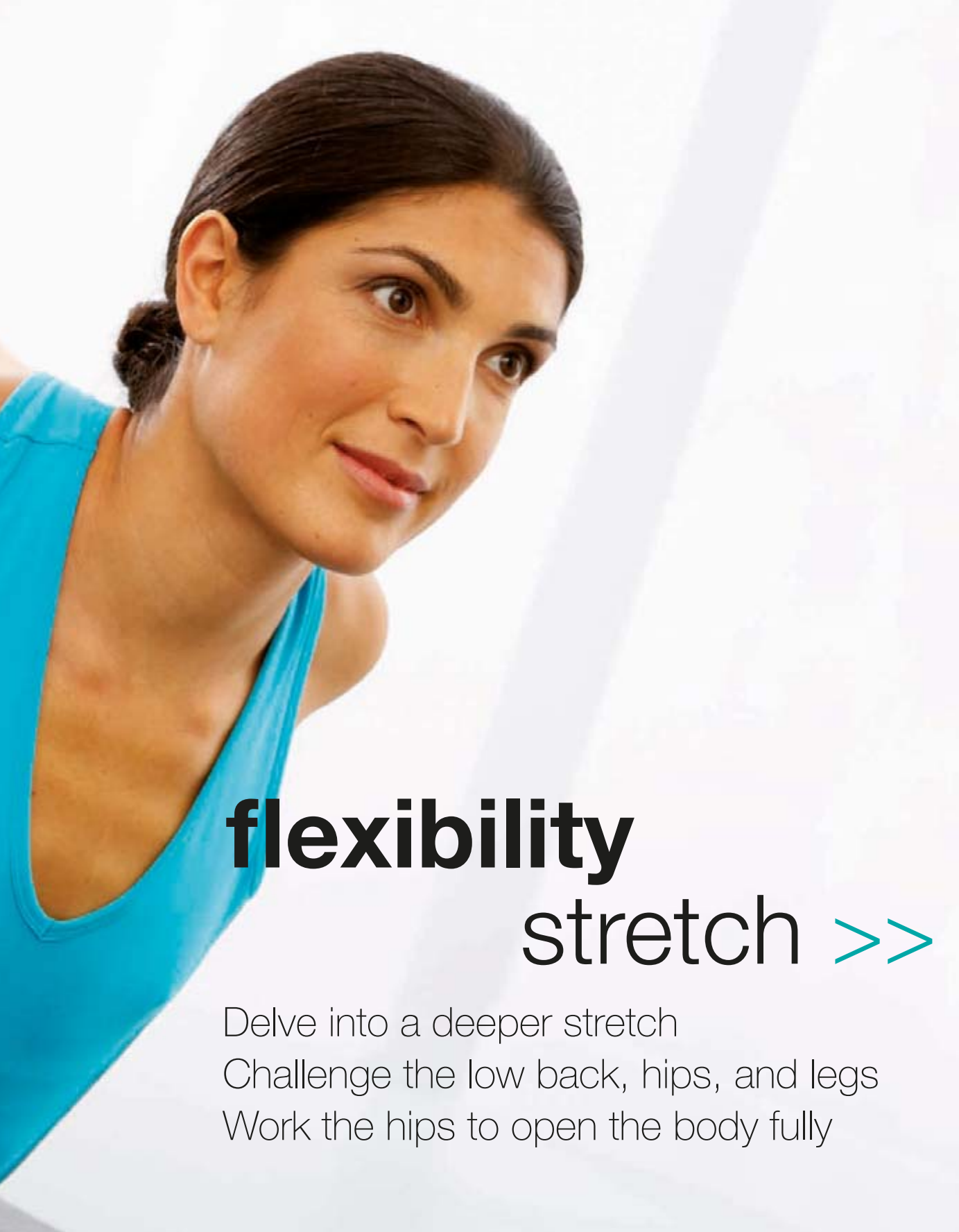
This is a common issue for many people when they start to work with their spine. Think of the spine as being like a child’s wooden segmented toy snake. The chunks you feel are groups of those segments moving together, instead of individually. Try to keep thinking about rolling over an imaginary fence and keep imagining the individual parts of the spine moving in turn—the neck, the upper back, the middle back.

>> **What must I focus on in kneeling stretches? All I can think about is the pressure on my knees.**

First of all, use padding if you feel any discomfort, then you can concentrate on finding your smile lines (see p16). Try to press the hips forward and press each knee equally into the floor. This is a great position for gaining low-back strength, and to help to straighten out any leg-length problems.



15 minute



flexibility stretch >>

Delve into a deeper stretch

Challenge the low back, hips, and legs

Work the hips to open the body fully

>> flexibility stretch

Flexibility is best understood as developing your own potential. Each body is unique, with its own set of bone shapes and muscle lengths. Take the challenge here to continue opening your entire body through the gateway of the hips. Hip suppleness is essential to spinal health.

The best way to achieve full body flexibility is to take on the challenge of the low back, hips, and legs. Many people give up when they feel they are not flexible in the hamstrings, but remember that the body also comprises fascial tissue (see p10) that, among other roles, ties the biomechanics of the upper body to that of the lower body. Now that you've done some loosening and lengthening of your whole body, it's time to focus on a deeper opening of your lower body. This sequence offers more moves that combine stretches with circular, rotational movements. It may require more modification than the first two workouts. Have heart. Challenging yourself with many different exercises will help you to identify your weak areas. There is always a back door to a movement—a way in which you can break it down and simply perform parts of it until they transform into old, familiar friends. Then you can join them together again and you're there!

The exercises

The Knee pumps prepare the legs and hips for the next moves. Part of my daily ritual, Knee pumps help to keep my knees and sciatic nerves—the long nerve along the backs of the legs—supple. There is no harm, and it is very beneficial, if you take the extra time to increase the repetitions to as many as 20 on each leg.

The Quad stretch, Thigh sweep, Fouetté stretch, and Figure 4 stretch are absolutely essential to my personal regimen. Go slow at first

>> tips for flexibility stretch

- **Suspend judgment** about your hip and leg stretch. Slow, steady persistence pays off. Look to yourself, and in yourself, for comparison.
- **Be sure to energize** your upper body as well as your lower body to create the necessary full-body connection.
- **Always use straps**, belts, or bands to modify when needed.
- **Changing the length of tight**, stiff muscles takes time. If your body type is overly flexible, tighten yourself and make the motion or position smaller so as not to over-stretch.

and take care to observe the transitions from one movement to the next. Work hard to make these transitions smooth; they are actually additional stretches that help to give the sequence its three-dimensional element.

Challenge yourself to master the sequence by imagining you are coaching someone and have to demonstrate and explain each move to them. Being a teacher forces you to think about the nature of each movement and is the best way to clarify them in your own mind.

When you get to Lying hamstring stretch and Advancing frogs, work hard to coordinate all the various parts. It may seem overwhelming to think of them all at once, so first start with the obvious—the basic shape. Again, modify, modify, modify. Rome wasn't built in a day. The next two moves, the Straddle and the Pull-the-thread lunge give you a bit of a rest.

Do try the Angel flight stretch. Remember, your shape and range will be different than our beautiful model's, so start low and slow. This stretch is the ultimate in opening the entire front of the pelvis and thighs. Stick with it, and I promise you will transform beyond all your expectations.

The Cobbler stretch is the gateway to opening the stretch of the hips. In this position, it is important to respect the “voice” of the knees and not over-stretch.



>> limbering knee pumps



flex the foot

gently lift the head



- Knee pumps** Lie on your back with the soles of your feet on the floor. Lift one foot and hold behind your thigh. Cup and hold the back of your head with the other hand. Inhale as you tuck your chin and slightly lift your head and shoulders. Press your head into your hand. At the same time, straighten the raised knee slightly.

- Exhale, press your back into the floor, and bend the raised knee at the same time as you lower the foot and head. Repeat, then open the knees slightly to make a "V" shape. Inhale, and repeat the raising and lowering of the head and leg 2 more times. Repeat on the other side.



>> energizing baby rolls



3 Baby rolls Still lying on your back, exhale, press your back down, and roll onto one side, bending your knees. Hold your knees, then inhale as you start to roll to the other side, straightening the top knee, then the bottom knee.



4 When you are lying flat on your back, your legs will be open in a brief straddle. Press down on the inner thighs to increase the stretch. Exhale as you bend the top knee and then the bottom knee to roll onto the other side. Continue rolling side to side for 3 sets.

>> elongating cobbler stretch



5 **Cobbler stretch** Come to a sitting position, take your feet close to the groin, and hold onto your ankles. Sit on a rolled blanket or towel if it helps you to sit up straight (see p117). Inhale and lift the shoulders, then slump and round your back, allowing your knees to lift.

feel it here



6 Exhale and roll your shoulders back and down. Press the knees down toward the floor, as you pull your feet in closer to the groin and lift yourself so you sit taller. Repeat 3 more times.

sit tall



>> articulating quad stretch



7 Quad stretch Lie on your side and bend both knees up toward your chest. Hold onto your bottom knee. Use a pillow under your neck if you feel any strain (see p117). Inhale, hold onto your top ankle, and pull your top knee gently toward your chest.



8 Exhale, then smoothly pull your top knee back. Do not let the bottom knee be pulled backward by the top leg. Stay, then pull backward a little more on the top knee. Repeat. Release your ankle and go onto your back, then return to your side and straighten your legs.



>> elongating thigh sweep



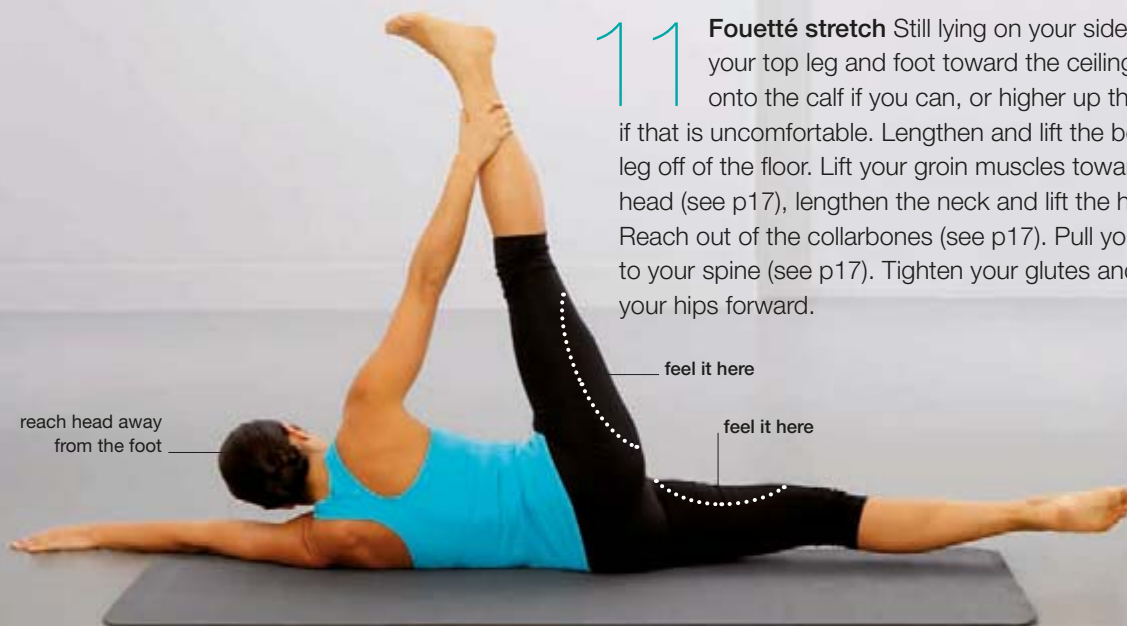
9 Thigh sweep Take your arms overhead on the floor and bend your top knee backward. Hold the wrist on the side of the bent leg, then inhale and slowly pull your wrist out and beyond your head as you roll backward toward the floor. Do not force it, and remember to modify the position of the knee if you find it uncomfortable.



10 Exhale, tuck your pelvis under, pull your wrist again, and roll to face forward toward the floor. Repeat, inhaling as you roll backward and exhaling as you roll forward.



>> stimulating fouetté stretch



11 Fouetté stretch Still lying on your side, reach your top leg and foot toward the ceiling. Hold onto the calf if you can, or higher up the leg if that is uncomfortable. Lengthen and lift the bottom leg off of the floor. Lift your groin muscles toward your head (see p17), lengthen the neck and lift the head. Reach out of the collarbones (see p17). Pull your navel to your spine (see p17). Tighten your glutes and press your hips forward.

reach head away
from the foot

feel it here

feel it here



12 Inhale and slowly roll onto your back. Pull the leg into the hip. Stay and breathe. Repeat one more time.

pull the leg
into the hip

press the calf into the floor

>> balancing figure 4 stretch



13 **Figure 4 stretch** Go onto your back, bend your knees, and place one ankle on the other thigh. Place one hand underneath that thigh and the palm of the other hand on the knee of the crossed leg. Lift the groin muscles toward the head to stabilize the spine. Inhale and pull the hand behind the thigh toward your chest.



14 Exhale and press the hand against the knee, away from your face, keeping the bent leg parallel to the floor. If the knee hurts, come out of the position, or loosen the posture. Repeat. Release both legs, thump your thighs, and breathe normally. Roll onto the other side and repeat Steps 7 to 14.



>> coordinating lying hamstring stretch

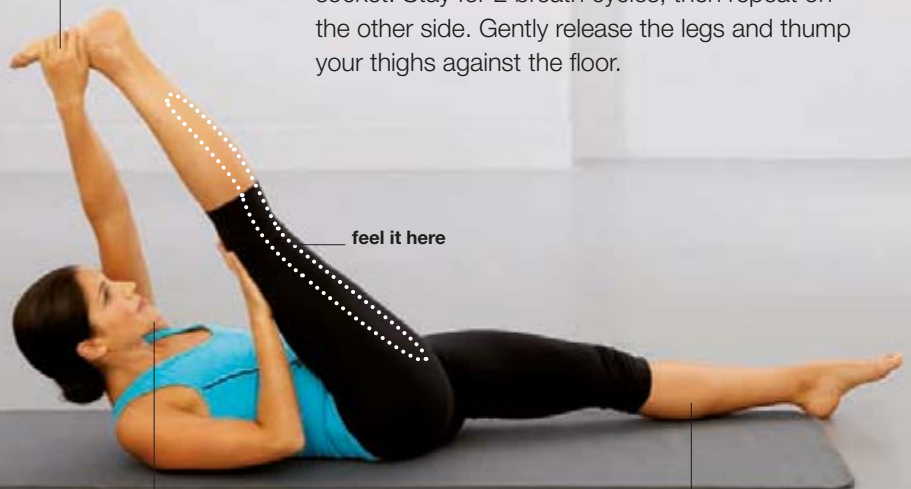


15 Lying hamstring stretch Still lying on your back, bend both knees, anchor your pelvis to the floor, lift your groin muscles toward your head, and pull your navel to your spine. Exhale, press your back into the floor, and lift one leg to the ceiling. Take the opposite hand to the lifted leg and hold the outside edge of the lifted foot, or hold lower down the leg if needed. Place the other hand on your thigh, just next to the knee. Inhale and straighten the bottom leg, pressing the calf down to the floor.



16 Exhale and lift the head. Gently press the hand on the thigh away from you. The top foot pulls your leg into the hip socket. Stay for 2 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side. Gently release the legs and thump your thighs against the floor.

pull the foot



tuck the chin

feel it here

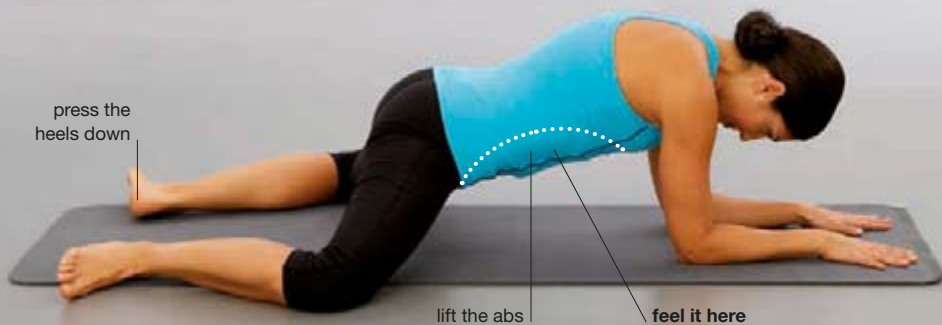
press the calf into the floor

>> accentuating advancing frogs

17 Advancing frogs Come onto your hands and knees, open your knees, reach your arms forward, and squat back, bringing your hips close to your heels. Support your back by lifting the abs. Stay for 2 breath cycles.



18 Move your torso and arms forward, and come up on your forearms. Actively press the inner edges of your heels into the floor. Your heels will come apart. Lift the groin muscles toward the head to avoid slumping in the low back. Stay for 2 breath cycles.



>> lengthening straddle

19 Straddle Come to a sitting position, sitting evenly on your sitbones, with your legs open to at least a 90° angle, and with your toes pulled toward your head. Lift your back and open your chest. Sit on a rolled blanket or towel if it helps you to sit up straight, or bend your knees. Lift the groin muscles up toward the head. Open your arms strongly sideways and reach out through the head, legs, and arms.



20 Inhale and reach up and over an imaginary fence to one side. Rest the lower hand on the floor behind the outstretched leg. Firm your waist. Exhale, then return to center by “painting the ceiling” with your top arm. Repeat on the other side, then release. Gently roll your shoulders to relax.



>> stabilizing pull-the-thread lunge

21 Pull-the-thread lunge Go onto your hands and knees, take one leg in front, and lean into it, palms either side of the front foot. Line up the bent-leg knee and toes straight ahead in front of the hip. Press the foot into the floor. Extend the other leg straight behind you and tuck the pelvis under strongly.



22 Pull an imaginary thread up to the ceiling with the hand on the side of the extended leg. Look up at the hand and press down into the floor with the other hand. Stay for 2 breath cycles. Take the hand down to the floor, then repeat with the other leg in front.



>> powering angel flight stretch

23 **Angel flight stretch** Lie on your stomach, face turned to one side. Feel the imaginary swimming-pool water lifting your abdomen off the floor (see p16). Press the tailbone down toward the heels. Inhale, then reach back and bend the knees to hold onto your ankles.



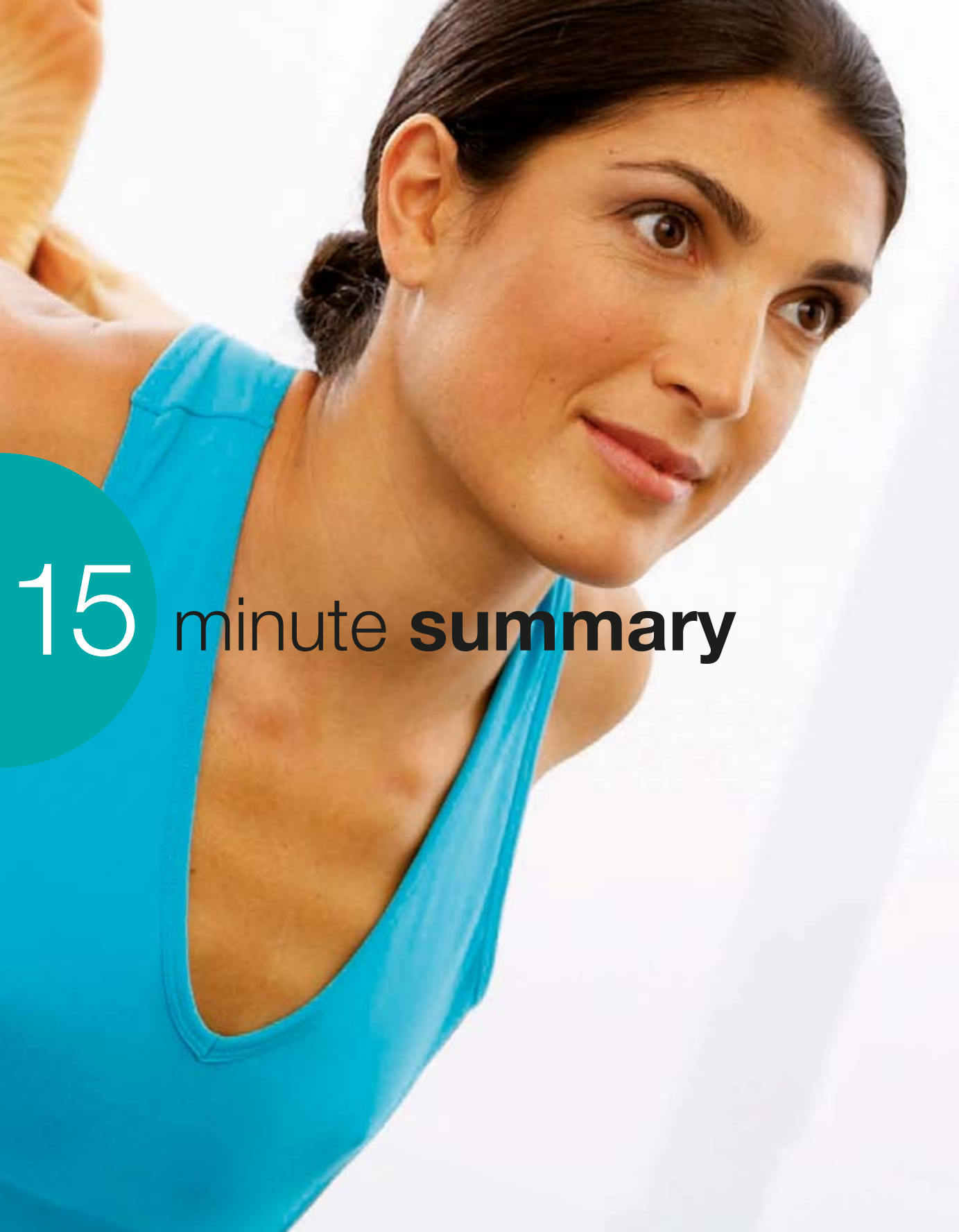
24 Exhale, press your feet against your hands, and lift your chest and thighs off the floor to make a bowlike shape. Stay for 2 breath cycles, then release your hands and feet and relax for another 2 breath cycles, breathing deeply.





flexibility stretch





15

minute **summary**

flexibility stretch at a glance

1



▲ **Limbering**
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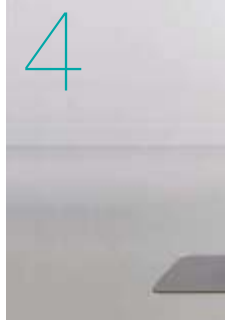
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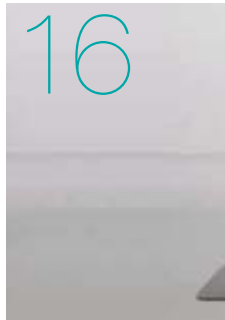
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▲ **Elongating** Cobbler stretch, page 72



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▲ **Accentuating** Advancing frogs, page 78



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▲ **Articulating**
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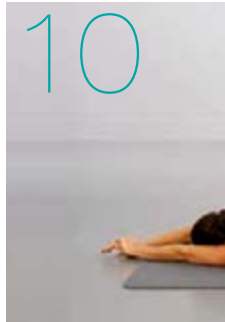
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▲ **Elongating** Thigh



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▲ **Lengthening**
Straddle,
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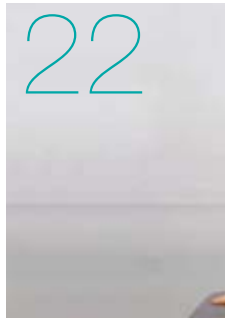
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sweep, page 74



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Fouetté stretch,
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▲ **Stimulating** Fouetté stretch, page 75



▲ **Powering**
Angel flight
stretch,
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e-thread lunge, page 80



▲ **Powering** Angel flight stretch, page 81

>> flexibility stretch FAQs

This program begins the true challenge to developing your potential to stretch, so take extra care not to force or strain. Here are some common questions and tips about how to modify positions that seem impossible and how to direct the stretch into the proper location for the best effect.

>> **What do the Knee pumps stretch?**

The Knee pumps stretch many parts of the hips and legs. The inner thigh and hamstring muscles are the most obvious. Not so obvious are the sciatic nerves, the big nerves that run from the pelvis into the legs. Adding the head lifts to the knee movements adds even more stretch. Combining different body parts in one exercise helps to stretch the fascia, the connective bands that hold the body structures together as though they were wrapped in plastic wrap (see pp10–11).

>> **Why do I have to hold onto the bottom knee in the Quad stretch?**

Holding the bottom knee ensures that the stretch is being directed into the front of the hip joint and not into the waist line. It may seem awkward at first, but with time it will become natural. Work hard to find the line between the buttocks and the hamstrings as you pull the foot backward. This will help you to gain the best possible stretch of the front of the dense thigh.

>> **What do I do if my knee hurts in the Thigh sweep?**

Always make sure your knee is not over-stretching in any of the stretches. You should never feel pain directly in the knee. If it does hurt, you can simply straighten the leg on top, open your legs slightly, and brace them against the floor. Then, tighten your hips and press them forward as you pull on the wrist, turning the chest forward and back.

>> **What does “fouetté” mean, and what does this exercise achieve?**

It means “whipped” and the action is easy to see when a ballet dancer performs a fouetté. The movement gives a three-dimensional stretch deep inside your hip. You have to imagine the internal roundness of the hip joint, the way the head of the thigh bone moves in the socket of the pelvis. The circular movement created by the Fouetté stretch improves the mobility of that joint and of your entire pelvis.

>> **Is it necessary for me to hold the outside of the opposite foot in the Lying hamstring stretch? I can’t reach it.**

This is an instance where having a stretching strap can come in handy. A bath robe belt also works well. Loop the belt around your foot and hold it with the hand on the opposite side. Do press the other hand against the thigh of the lifted leg, even if you cannot straighten the leg. You have to start somewhere. You can and will improve.

>> **I can’t even remotely begin to get into the Angel flight stretch. Can you help?**

This is a challenging exercise, even for veteran stretchers. Again, the use of a belt can help here. You can even start by holding one leg, then the other since there are two repetitions of the exercise. An alternative is to lie on your stomach on the floor with your feet behind you over a sofa seat. Then press your hands against the floor and lift your chest as in the Modified cobra (see p32).

>> **I only feel pressure in my knees in Advancing frogs. Where should I feel the stretch?**

First, try to get your knees as open as possible and place the weight on the inside of the knees, not on top of the kneecaps. You should feel the stretch deep in the innermost fold of the leg at the groin. Be sure to keep the waist lifted since that takes pressure off the inner thigh. Use your hands and forearms to direct the pressure back and down toward the inner thigh.



15 minute

strength stretch >>

Find your peak of performance

Be strong yet lithe

Fluidity leads to ease and grace



>> strength stretch

You don't need to be a contortionist to master this final sequence. Use your body control to guide you into these more advanced movements. Regard it as your ultimate goal. Even beginners can discover how much control they need to exert, whether they are trying to balance in a precarious pose or performing the simplest stretch.

Strength by definition means grounding and control. See this sequence as one feat of strength after another in an Olympic trial. Close up, one can see the suppleness of the athlete's body, and in action you can see the litheness of their motions. Think of all the hours of preparation Olympic athletes must endure to reach their final goal. In this sequence, look at each exercise as a goal in and of itself. The trick is to break each exercise down by starting small and gradually building to a larger and steadier range of motion. Remember that achieving a general level of fitness takes about two months of practice, and developing a split may take more like six months, depending on how naturally flexible you are. The recipe for Olympic development is to stress the body, then to rest it. Be smart and give your body a good rest after practicing this sequence. The poses and movements here move toward a crescendo that primes you for success.

The exercises

Set the tone for strength by standing tall in the Butterfly stretch and the Upper side bend. Feel your upper body moving against the lower body, as if your lower body were rooted and anchored, like a great oak tree. The series of squats that follows coordinates the strength and suppleness of the spine with the suppleness of the legs. Get more benefit by opening your knees as wide as

>> tips for strength stretch

- **Think of your spine** and legs grounded like the trunk and roots of a great oak tree.
- **Remember, you're not failing** if you need to use props and smaller positions to start to get familiar with the exercises.
- **Find your "pelvic diaphragm,"** and keep looking for ways to coordinate your inner muscle strength as you work with larger movements.
- **Always be careful** with large stretches of the neck. Never pull on the head.

you can in the Wide squat twist and in the Deep squat. These squats also provide a great opportunity to strengthen the "pelvic diaphragm"—the parachutelike muscle layer that lies at the bottom of the torso.

As you perform the next exercise, the Neck stretch, be mindful that you are now coordinating the "neck diaphragm"—the parachutelike muscle and soft tissue layers defining the top of the rib cage—with the pelvic diaphragm. So this sequence works on more than meets the eye. It is the ultimate in strength and control. Become willing

to acquire the ability to coordinate deep muscles with the larger, more obvious muscles, such as the abs, the glutes, and the thighs.

Continue this coordination as you now ripple the spine more strongly in the Kneeling cat and the Kneeling side stretch. The goal is not whether you can approximate the position, but whether you can take such a rangy pose and still coordinate the deeper muscles. Keep this concept activated in the Fish stretch. The last three exercises are the most challenging of all. I have faith in you, and know that little steps make big leaps possible. Modify. Go slowly. Every attempt warrants a gold star of success. Keep your eyes on the prize; the application of stretch with control. Fulfill the potential of your body, one step at a time.

Connecting the deeper core muscles while tensing the larger, outer muscles in these strength stretches adds value and effectiveness to your work.



>> **limbering** butterfly stretch

1 Butterfly stretch Stand with legs completely together and pressing the base of the big and little toes, and the middle of the heel of both feet on the floor. Lift your groin muscles toward the head (see p17). Pull your navel to your spine (see p17). Clasp your hands behind your head, inhale, and lift up and forward from your waist. Simultaneously bow your head, bend your knees, and bring the elbows toward each other.



2 Exhale, straighten the legs, and stretch up and out of your waist, fanning the elbows open. Reach out through the points of the elbows and feel as if your breastbone is being pulled up toward the ceiling. Repeat, then relax and shake the hands.



anchor the feet

>> opening upper side bend

3 Upper side bend Still with your legs completely together, renew your form. Lift the groin muscles toward the head, and pull the abs up and into your spine. Clasp your hands behind your head.



anchor the feet

4 Inhale and lift up and out of the rib cage, over an imaginary fence under one armpit. Tilt one elbow down toward the floor, the other up toward the ceiling. Exhale and take your shoulders back to center. Feel a “V” of strength from the small of the low back to the points of the elbows. Repeat on the other side, and then repeat one more set.



>> lengthening flat back squat

5 Flat back squat Lift the abs and roll down your spine into a squatting position. Let your knees open and go onto the balls of your feet. Lean on your hands, then inhale as you lift diagonally up and out with your chest, keeping your back flat and extended. Imagine you are looking under a table.



6 Exhale slowly as you lift the hips upward, taking the heels as high as you can. Straighten your knees and tuck your chin into the legs. Keep lifting the groin muscles toward the head. Stay and breathe, then repeat, intensifying the stretch at the end. Lower and relax. Repeat.



>> stimulating wide squat twist



7 Wide squat twist Come to a standing position with your feet wider than hip-width apart and your toes facing outward. Lift the groin muscles toward the head, inhale, and lower your hips. Bring your hands to the thighs, take some of your weight into them, and check that your toes are in line with your knees.



8 Inhale, then press backward on one hand on the inside of the knee, twisting that shoulder down. Look up and out in the opposite direction. Stay for 2 breath cycles, then exhale and bring the shoulders back to center. Come up, shake your legs a little, and repeat on the other side.



>> sustaining deep squat



9 **Deep squat** Resume the wide position of the legs, with your feet wider than hip-width apart and your toes facing outward. Inhale, lift the groin muscles toward the head, and slowly lower your hips. Hold onto your ankles or hold higher up the legs if that is more comfortable.



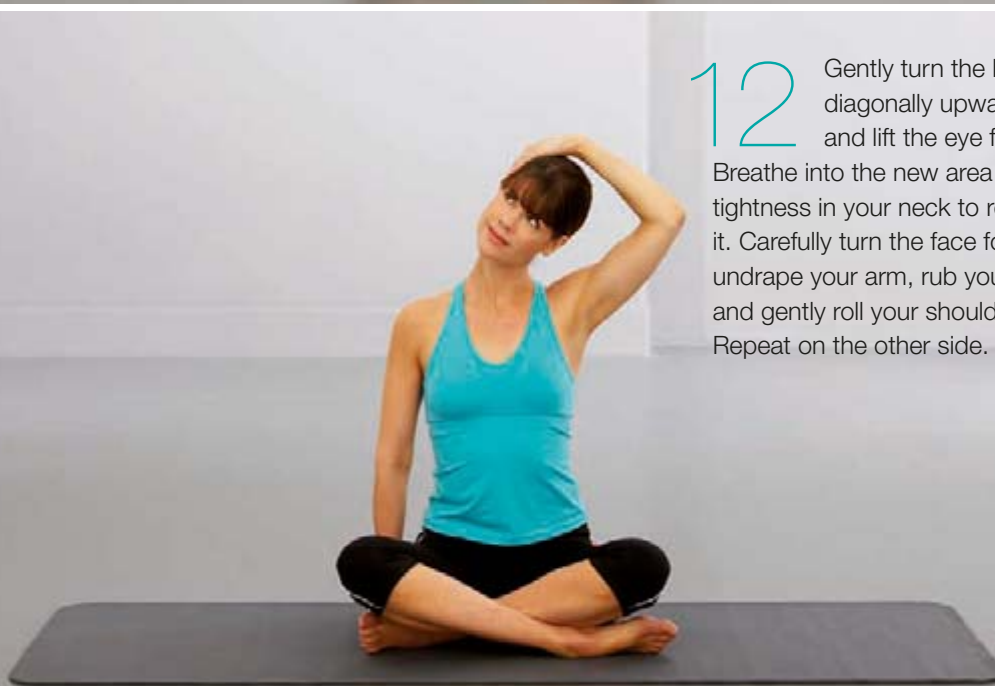
10 Keep lifting the groin muscles, then press your elbows back against the inner thighs. Stay, then slowly come up, gently shake your hands and legs, and relax.

>> articulating neck stretch



11 Neck stretch Find a comfortable sitting position on the floor, preferably with legs crossed. Sit on a rolled blanket or towel if it helps you to sit up straight. Place one hand, palm up, underneath the sitting bone. Drape the other arm over the head to reach the ear. Breathe into the area between the ear and the tip of the shoulder. Inhale, then tilt the chin diagonally down.

12 Gently turn the head diagonally upward and lift the eye focus. Breathe into the new area of tightness in your neck to release it. Carefully turn the face forward, undrape your arm, rub your neck, and gently roll your shoulders. Repeat on the other side.



>> **elongating** kneeling cat

- 13** **Kneeling cat** Come onto your hands and knees. Reach one foot forward into a lunge position, hands on the floor either side of the front leg. Make sure the toes of the front foot are flat on the floor. Tuck the pelvis under and lean toward the back leg. Inhale, round the back, and look at the navel.



- 14** Open your mouth, exhale from the back of the throat, lengthen your low back, then start arching your back and lifting your chest. Imagine you are looking under a table. Repeat, inhaling and rounding, and exhaling and arching. Repeat on the other side.



>> **balancing** kneeling side stretch

15 **Kneeling side stretch**
Starting on your hands and knees, take one leg diagonally in front, knee bent, sole of the foot on the floor. Turn both legs out slightly, lower the head, and take the arms in front of you, touching your middle fingers together. Then roll up through the spine and fan your arms open sideways.



16 Tuck your pelvis under and reach your top arm up and over toward the bent leg. Rest your lower forearm on the thigh of the bent leg. Reach up and out through the third finger of the top arm. Lift the groin muscles toward the head. Stay for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.



>> centering fish stretch



17 Fish stretch Lie on your back, knees bent, soles of the feet on the floor. Place your palms on the floor by your hips. Exhale, then gently press the low back forward and arch your back slightly.



arch the lower back

18 Roll your shoulder blades back and down, then press down on your forearms and arch your back more to come up onto the top of your head. Put as little pressure on the head as possible. Stay for 1 long breath cycle. Relax, then repeat.



minimal pressure on the head

>> powering thigh lunge



19 **Thigh lunge** Go onto your hands and knees. Lengthen your back so it is parallel to the floor, like a table top. Reach one foot forward into a lunge position and take your hands to the floor either side of the foot.



20 Tuck the toes of the back foot under, lengthen the leg back behind you, and straighten the back knee. Lift the groin muscles toward the head and, balancing, place one hand and then the other on the front thigh. Press the hands down on the thigh and lift the chest. Stay for 2 breath cycles. Exhale and release, then repeat on the other side.



>> coordinating pigeon arabesque



21 **Pigeon arabesque** Sit with one leg bent back and the other bent forward.

Your legs should make the letter “Z” with your back knee touching the front foot. Place your hands on the floor in front of you. Straighten the back leg behind you, with the knee pointing toward the floor. Lift your groin muscles toward your head.



22 Hold your position and reach the arm on the same side as the back leg out in front of you. Reach the arm on the bent leg side out to the side. Stretch up through the head. Stay for 2 breath cycles. Switch legs and repeat.



>> energizing the split



23 **The split** Switch legs and resume the “Z” sit, then lengthen the back leg behind you. Lift your groin muscles toward your head and pull your navel to your spine. Lean on your hands.



24 Switch legs, resume the “Z” sit, lengthen the back leg behind you, and renew your form. Find your balance, reach your hands behind you, clasp them, and try to straighten your elbows. If you prefer, you can stay with hands at your sides for balance. Stay for 2 breath cycles, then release. Come onto your back and thump your thighs.



strength stretch



15 minute **summary**



strength stretch at a glance

1



▲ **Limbering** Butterfly stretch, page 94

2



▲ **Limbering** Butterfly stretch, page 94

3



▲ **Opening** Upper side bend, page 95

13



▲ **Elongating** Kneeling cat, page 100

14



▲ **Elongating** Kneeling cat, page 100

15



▲ **Balancing** Kneeling side stretch, page 101



4

▲ **Opening** Upper side bend, page 95



5

▲ **Lengthening** Flat back squat, page 96



6

▲ **Lengthening** Flat back squat, page 96



16

▲ **Balancing** Kneeling side stretch, page 101



17

▲ **Centering**
Fish stretch,
page 102



18

▲ **Centering** Fish stretch, page 102



7

▲ **Stimulating** Wide squat twist, page 97



8

▲ **Stimulating** Wide squat twist, page 97



9

▲ **Sustaining** Deep squat, page 98



19

▲ **Powering** Thigh lunge, page 103



20

▲ **Powering** Thigh lunge, page 103



21

▲ **Coordinating** Pigeon arabesque, page 104



▲ **Sustaining** Deep squat, page 98



▲ **Articulating** Neck stretch, page 99



▲ **Articulating** Neck stretch, page 99



▲ **Energizing** The split, page 105



▲ **Coordinating** Pigeon arabesque, page 104



▲ **Energizing** The split, page 105

>> **strength stretch** FAQs

Honesty and attention to detail are what make all the difference when it comes to bringing true strength to your stretch. Physical development takes time, so be patient. Here are some common questions and answers to help you in your quest to find your true physical potential.

>> **I get dizzy during the Flat back squat. Is there anything I can do to prevent the dizziness?**

Dizziness is common when people first start doing upside-down exercises. The inner ear may not be used to inverting the head, and this is why you may feel some dizziness. But it's healthy to move the head in different orientations in an active movement for a limited time. The eyes usually control most of our balance. Simply keeping your eyes open, and going slowly will help your body to accommodate to the position.

>> **What if my hips don't go down very far in the Wide squat twist and the Deep squat?**

Just go down as far as you feel you can support the position. You'll still get a great groin stretch. Another option would be to hold onto a chair or other piece of furniture to steady yourself. Then you might find that you are able to bend more deeply into the squats. Consistent practice definitely makes for improvement in this stretch.

>> **My head doesn't bend well to the side for the Neck stretch. Should I pull harder?**

First of all, never pull on the head; let gravity and the simple weight of the arm do the work. Over time it will open up. This is an exercise that truly requires precision and care in its execution. It gives a fabulous stretch of the different muscles of the neck. To access all those muscles, be sure to keep the head bent to the side, however slightly, as you turn your face.

>> **I'm not feeling much stretch in the Kneeling cat. How can I find the stretch?**

A common mistake here is to let the weight of the hip move toward the front leg. Be sure to keep the hips moving backward, especially as you lift the chest upward. Another tip is to literally stick your buttocks back and up, trying to arch the low back as you lift your chest. Yet another tip is to keep your chest as low as possible to the leg throughout the exercise.

>> **I feel as if I'm not going anywhere in the Fish stretch. Is there some trick to it?**

Some people's body types mean they are able to arch their low back better than other people. It's purely structural. Don't ever force a position. If you can't get the stretch in this area, try propping a firm pillow or ball in between your shoulder blades. Practice by placing it there, bracing yourself onto your forearms, and squeezing between the shoulder blades for several breaths.

>> **Is going into The split necessary to consider myself really flexible?**

Not really. As with the Fish stretch, body type often determines how naturally flexible you are. The main goal is a comfortable, pain-free body. Sometimes flexibility is undesirable, especially if a person's level of strength is too low to sustain the increased range of motion. A lithe body is preferable to a loose, disorganized body. That's why it's so important to emphasize the strength aspect as you develop your stretch.

>> **How can there be both stretch and strength in one exercise?**

Strength is found in stretches by tensing the muscles in noncollapsed positions. Inversions and bending the spine over closed legs use your body weight as resistance to aid strengthening. Different bodily orientations, and moving hard-to-reach areas such as the rib cage create comprehensive strength. Strengthening many small parts leads to greater strength overall.



15 minute





moving on >>

Life propels us into forward
motion and change
Incorporate stretching for
a healthy life

>> **modify** as needed

It's not a failing to change an exercise to suit your needs, whether it's because of pain, age, or stiffness. There's a back door to every stretch. Nor is it cheating to use props and modifications. It's just plain wise.

The body can move in multiple directions with a great deal of ease, yet people are often deterred from doing stretching exercises because they worry about feeling discouraged. We would all love to look like the models featured in this book, but use them to help you see the stretching exercises clearly, not to compare yourself with them.

Some of the stretches may feel a little strange or unusual, especially if you are new to exercise. Part of the reason we stretch in unusual positions is to identify our weak links, so pay attention and focus on what feels too tight, too loose, or painful.

If an exercise doesn't feel right, there's always a way to make it more accessible. Some people have trouble sitting on the floor because they have tight hamstrings, glutes, or tightness in the low back, or a combination of one or more of these. Sitting on a foot stool, ottoman, towel, or bolster can give just the lift needed to make the stretch possible.

Knees should never hurt during stretching. If they feel painful, support them on pillows or bolsters to take the pressure off. Another tip for this pose is to move the feet farther away from the groin.



Pay special attention to your knees and monitor them for signs of pain or discomfort. “No pain, no gain” definitely does not apply to these complex joints. If you need to, prop them up with pillows when you are sitting to take the strain off the ligaments. If they feel tender when you kneel on them in weight-bearing positions, support them with some form of padding. Straighten them out of a bent-leg position if it’s uncomfortable. If one of the knees refuses to straighten, as it might in the Lying hamstring stretch (see p77), use a towel, belt, or strap to reach the foot.

You can increase or decrease the intensity of a stretch as it suits you (perhaps your body feels different on different days or at different times of day) by pulling or extending more or less. Breathing and relaxing help you stretch farther. Alternatively, try modulating the intensity of a stretch by elongating in a progression from one to ten, and then reducing it. The level of intensity should never go into the “strain zone” and you should not have extreme pain after you have performed your stretches. Remember: compare only yourself to yourself to make the greatest gain.

Help for different stretches. A towel over the toes acts as a strap for a hamstring stretch—elastic exercise bands don’t work as well. A book under the pelvis (right, above) will help you to sit forward on the sitbones. A rolled towel placed under the head straightens the neck and helps you avoid neck pain (right, center). A towel is excellent as padding when you are kneeling (right, below).



>> stretches for everyday life

It's easy to take your stretches into everyday life. Notice how you move when you are grooming, dressing, even cooking and cleaning, and turn each movement into a stretch. And think “office” as well as “home” to get the most out of your stretch regime.

Look at the ways your body moves in everyday life. Notice how different movements feel, such as brushing your hair or pulling on a sweater or pants. Does the task feel comfortable? Do you have the same range of motion from one side to another? How does it feel to bend over to reach to a pet? Let your answers to these questions guide you to set yourself goals that will make an action a little easier or smoother.

Gradual changes

Changes to the way we move happen gradually over time. Diminishing range of motion creeps up on people of every age. A student notices writing arm and shoulders tightening during a long exam. A young mother notices a tight chest or sore low



Brushing your hair is a great way to stretch the shoulders and chest. Try switching the brush to your nondominant hand to balance each side of the body.

back as she holds or reaches down to a toddler. Older adults notice they can't bend to the floor or reach up into cupboards as easily as in times past.

Your adaptable body

Life's distractions, such as being preoccupied with a demanding job, with a new baby, or with having to juggle a long commute with household duties can sideline us from regular physical activity. Then suddenly we notice a change and start to worry that our bodies are not as mobile as they once were.

The good news is that your body is adaptable. It changes to accept what the environment is telling it to do. If you inadvertently restrict its motions—for instance, by sitting for long periods—it adapts to the smaller, less frequent motions. Conversely, it can re-adapt. That's why it's important to find ways in everyday life to get an extra little bit of stretch. Small changes can keep your body healthy over time.

In a crowded schedule

It's commendable to devote an hour or two a day to getting exercise, but not everyone can do that. Our 15-minute programs make it possible to get exercise, even with the most crowded schedule. Yet neither should you overlook the power of taking 25 seconds—four breath cycles—to feel the stretch in an everyday position or movement. This will add to your overall physical wellbeing. Using this strategy during those overwhelming times of life, when every second appears to be accountable, will pay off handsomely.



Putting on your socks is a good time for a hamstring stretch. Simply lift the leg, or reach over to it, bow the head, and take a few breaths.

Working in an office gives you a good opportunity to use some chair stretches from the Wake Up The Stretch program (see pp26–29). Reach your hands behind your head and wing your elbows open in a chest stretch. It helps your workday go faster and more smoothly. Sitting work is probably some of the most tiring, and it's important to take frequent breaks, even for a few breaths. Office stretches increase clear thinking as well as helping to avoid computer overuse problems that can affect your chest, hands, and arms. Intermittent breathing and stretches will make you a more productive worker, whatever you do for a living.

An everyday habit

Perseverance is simple when you make stretches an everyday habit. Habits can be formed in as little as 21 days, so set a goal on your calendar for the next 21 days and find opportunities for a stretch at home, work, and play. Have faith: the body will change, but only with persistence. Stretching in everyday life makes that persistence easy.

Take a twist break at the office. Cross one leg over the other and turn in the direction of the crossed leg, just as in our Seated cross-leg twist (see p28).

>> **everyday stretches** that make a difference

- **Reach a little farther** to stretch into that cupboard. Take a break. Yawn to stretch the jaw. Open the eyes and look upward to open the chest and neck.
- **Stretch your legs and hips** when putting on and taking off clothes. Practice lunges when vacuuming and move your hips from side to side when sweeping.
- **Renew your posture at the office** by squeezing between the shoulder blades and rolling your shoulders. Firm the glutes and sit up tall.



>> relaxation techniques

Relaxation takes discipline in a busy world. Chores, obligations, and crises sap energy reserves and present road blocks to emotional balance. Try these scheduled and unscheduled calming techniques to make relaxation a priority in your life.

Relaxation is great for renewing the body, mind, and spirit. During every waking hour we expend our physical and mental energy, so we need to replenish it. Take a cue from professional athletes who aim for peak fitness. They know that the key to achieving optimal functioning lies in alternating periods of stress with times of relief and rest.

We all need a certain amount of stress in our lives to challenge and motivate us. But we also need to shake off any fatigue on a regular basis to avoid chronic weariness.

Sleep and rest

It's important for us all to renew our resources with nightly sleep and timely rest. Developing a healthy nightly ritual is essential in establishing an optimal renewal plan. Make your bedroom a sanctuary by creating a soothing, quiet place with your favorite

Use the contract–release method to lessen the tensions in your body. One by one, tighten and release each body part. End by tensing your whole body (inset, below), then let go and breathe deeply (main picture, below).



>> tips for dealing with daily stress

- **To cope with life's ups and downs**
be sure to make time daily for refreshment and restoration.
- **Manage your stress.** Try a progressive relaxation technique, breathe deeply, or learn to meditate to reverse the effects of stress.
- **Develop good sleep hygiene.** Make your bedroom an inviting, quiet, peaceful sanctuary and let go of the day's hassles and worries.

bedding and gentle lighting. Don't have the television or your computer in the bedroom. It should be a space strictly for unwinding.

Don't drink alcohol last thing at night. Instead, savor a cup of a caffeine-free drink for an uninterrupted night's slumber. Some people find a warm bath before bed helps to relax them. Light reading material can also quiet the mind and help you leave the day's worries behind you. Make sure the room is completely dark while you're asleep. Studies have shown that exposure to light during sleep can disturb your body's natural cycles.

If you awaken during the night, focus on the pleasant texture of the bedding, take deep breaths, and relish the luxurious time you have for rest. Strive to get seven to eight hours of the deep sleep you need for complete physical restoration.

Using stretching to help you relax

Relaxation techniques can greatly influence the restoration cycle. Simple exercises such as the progressive contract-relax technique (see opposite) can quickly lower body tension and take your mind away from overly analytical thoughts. For instance, tense the fists as you count to ten, then relax them. In order of progression, apply the same tense-then-relax method to the shoulders, thighs, calves, feet,



Practice deep breathing. The diaphragmatic breath is found by placing your fingers at the bottom of your breast bone and sniffing or coughing a few times. Inhale deeply; feel the rib cage expand.

abdomen, and finally the face, puckering your lips and eyes strongly. End the technique by tensing your entire body, and then completely let go of all your body tension as you breathe five deep, long breaths. Notice how relaxed your body and your mind have become.

Another simple yet reliable relaxation technique, excellent for any setting and any location, is deep diaphragmatic breathing (see above). Place your fingers at the bottom of your breast bone to find the way your diaphragm moves. Sniff quickly several times or cough to feel the muscles move. Breathe into the diaphragm and feel these muscles expand for four seconds (think "1-alligator, 2-alligator", etc.). Then exhale for 8 seconds. Slow breathing reverses the fight-or-flight, adrenalin-based panic that's part of our fast-paced society.

>> strategies for healthy living

We all strive to achieve a good quality of life, whether we're just starting out or have reached retirement. Work, play, good nutrition, and the ability to relish the joys and cope with the disappointments of life are all a part of the equation that will bring us health and contentment.

Wouldn't you rather live in a high-functioning, optimal way than a low-functioning one? Physically, we need energy to meet the demands of the day. We want to move around and lift and bend without pain or limitation, which is where the stretching programs in this book come into play. Mentally, we want to be alert and keep our homes and jobs running well. Emotionally, it is preferable to be stable, acting instead of reacting, in our family and professional encounters.

Balance and positivity

There are many things in life that we cannot control, so focus on those you can. A good starting point is a healthy, well-balanced diet. Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables and about three 3-ounce servings of protein (meat, fish, dairy, eggs, grains, legumes, nuts) per day. Also limit your intake of starches (potatoes and bread) and fats (butter and oils). Doctors recommend that we eat six small meals a day. This ignites the metabolism, provides brain food, and promotes a steady emotional state.

Another key is to balance your activities between work and play. Work may be essential for a living but don't make it your life. Take up a hobby. Walk outdoors; breathe deeply. Even developing a sense of humor adds play into the day. Nurture your rest and sleep habits (see p120). Relaxation techniques, meditation, and good, sound sleep are building blocks that add to the foundation of health.

Finally, never forget that you choose your attitude. A positive attitude rises to the challenge

>> adding quality to your life

- **Be proactive** in balancing healthy nutrition, activity, and rest.
- **Select fresh seasonal foods.** Divide your plate in two. Fill one half of it with fruits or vegetables. Then split the other half between a protein and a serving of starch.
- **Balance work with play.** Find a hobby and your funny bone. Cherish family and friends. Get outdoors. Take time to rest and recharge.
- **Protect and nurture** a positive outlook. See how it helps you deal with life's challenges and "failed experiments."

of discouragement and changing circumstances, Aggressively preserve your positive outlook; seek out positive people. And acknowledge the big picture of life, with its cycle of peaks and valleys.

The perfect hobby presents a challenge and gives an opportunity for mastery outside your regular routine. Taking your stretching to another level, perhaps by joining a yoga class, will challenge you to go farther and find your inner grace and balance. You might be surprised by what you achieve when you "go for it."



useful resources

Taking a proactive stance toward your health care will pay off royally. A comprehensive program of health care entails first getting your own team of health-care practitioners together, as well as organizing your own health-care strategy for healthy living.

Stretching comes under several categories and can be integrated into other programs such as fitness, Pilates, physiotherapy, yoga, and dance. Here are some resources to get you started.

Fitness

American Council on Exercise

AceFitness.org

The American Council on Exercise® is a nonprofit organization committed to enriching quality of life through safe and effective exercise and physical activity. As America's Authority on Fitness, ACE protects the public by setting certification and continuing education standards for fitness professionals.

American College of Sports Medicine

acsm.org

ACSM is devoted to public awareness and education about the benefits of physical activity for people of all ages, from all occupations.

Pilates

Pilates Method Alliance

pilatesmethodalliance.org

The Pilates Method Alliance (PMA) is the international not-for-profit professional association for the Pilates method. The PMA's mission is to protect the public by establishing certification and continuing education standards for Pilates professionals.

Yoga

Iyengar Yoga Association

iyengar-yoga.com

The Iyengar method of yoga is initially learned through the in-depth study of asanas (posture) and pranayama (breath control). Mr. Iyengar has systematized over 200 classical yoga asanas and 14 different types of pranayamas. These have been structured and categorized so as to allow a beginner to progress surely and safely from basic postures to the most advanced as they gain flexibility, strength, and sensitivity in mind, body, and spirit.

Ashtanga Yoga Institute

kpjayi.org

Ashtanga Yoga is an ancient system of yoga that was taught by Vamana Rishi in the *Yoga Korunta*. This text was imparted to Sri T. Krishnamacharya in the early 1900s by his guru Rama Mohan Brahmachari, and was later passed down to Pattabhi Jois.

Anusara Yoga

anusara.com.

Anusara (a-nu-sar-a), means "flowing with grace," "going with the flow," "following your heart." Founded by John Friend in 1997, Anusara Yoga is a powerful hatha yoga system that unifies a Tantric philosophy of Intrinsic Goodness with Universal Principles of Alignment™.

Physical therapy

apta.org

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) is a national professional organization representing more than 72,000 members. Its goal is to foster

advancements in physical therapy practice, research, and education. Look for its “Find a PT” section to help you find a PT in your area.

Nutrition

nutr diary.com

This free online food and exercise diary will help you analyze and chart your diet and activity level so that you can attain your diet goals. Whether you want to maintain, lose, or gain weight, having a goal and keeping track is a great motivator to stick with a healthy eating and exercise program.

drclwydewilson.com

Dr. Clyde Wilson is a former Stanford University instructor and runs the Sports Medicine Institute in Palo Alto, California. He is an expert in human performance, and his website offers free downloads on optimal nutrition for general health as well as athletic nutrition.

Exercise for postural problems

The following useful DVDs are published by Suzanne Martin's company Pilates Therapeutics LLC (pilates therapeutics.com).

Pilates Therapeutics® The Upper Core: Exercises for a Pain-Free Life (2002)

This DVD was developed to respond to the prevalence of repetitive stress injuries of the

shoulders, arms, and hands that have accompanied our increased use of computers.

Pilates Therapeutics® The Pelvic Core: More Exercise for a Pain-Free Life (2002)

This DVD focuses on 24 balancing exercises to help low back and pelvic pain, knee problems, and post-pregnancy restoration.

Pilates Therapeutics® The Scoliosis Management Series

Scoliosis Series Part 1:

Management & Improvement featuring Wall Springs (2006)

Part 1 is designed to help persons who have scoliosis, or abnormal curvature of the spine.

Scoliosis Series Part 2:

Breathing Exercises as Part of Scoliosis Management (2007)

Part 2 continues the concepts for managing scoliosis from Part 1, but focuses on breathing for long-term management.

Other DVDs by Suzanne Martin

Pilates Therapeutics® A Step-Wise Approach to Post-Natal Restoration (2007)

This DVD is designed to be of use to any woman who has given birth in the last 18 months or will give birth.

Pilates Therapeutics® Breast Cancer Survivor's Guide to Physical Restoration (2007)

This DVD is for women who have

had or will have surgeries related to breast cancer treatment.

Other publications by Suzanne Martin

Stretching

(Dorling Kindersley 2005)

A best-seller, *Stretching* is a comprehensive guidebook.

Starting with a full-body catalog of stretches, *Stretching* helps beginners as well as advanced stretchers to find the appropriate routine for individual needs.

Sections include a 3-week postural program, how to begin stretching, stretches for everyday activities and sports, as well as therapeutic stretches for arms, and the low back.

Don't miss out on the award-winning *Stretching Card Deck* created from the original 2005 edition.

15 Minute Better Back Workout (Dorling Kindersley 2008)

Better Back has four 15-minute workouts based on the Pilates Method. Each section has 12 exercises that are explained in detail with photography and text as well as demonstrated on an included DVD. Each section consists of a warm-up, and specific abdominal and back exercises.

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