

Stretching Exercises To Help Stay Active and Independent

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It's a good idea to speak with your doctor before you start a stretching program, especially if you have chronic conditions that affect your muscles and joints, such as arthritis or Parkinson's disease.

1. Seated shoulder stretch



Primarily stretches the shoulder

Repeat: 2–4 times

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Sit up straight on a chair. Put your left hand on your right shoulder. Cup your left elbow with your right hand.

Movement: Roll your shoulders down and back, then gently pull your left elbow across your chest as you extend your left arm. Hold. Return to the starting position, then repeat on the opposite side. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Stretch to the point of mild tension, not pain.

- Keep your shoulders down and back away from your ear during the stretch.
- Breathe comfortably.

2. Seated rotation



Primarily stretches the back

Repeat 2–4 times

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Sit up straight on a chair with your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart, and your arms at your sides.

Movement: Slowly rotate your head and torso to the right side, placing your left hand on the outside of your right knee and your right hand next to your right hip. Hold. Slowly return to the starting position. Repeat to the opposite side. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Stretch to the point of mild tension, not pain.
- As you rotate, keep your hips squared and facing forward.
- Breathe comfortably.

3. Standing hamstring stretch



Primarily stretches the back of the thigh

Repeat 2–4 times

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Stand up straight with your arms at your sides.

Movement: Extend your right leg straight in front of you, heel grounded on the floor and toes pointing to the ceiling. Place your hands on your upper thighs for support and hinge forward from the hip, keeping your spine neutral. Hold. Return to the starting position. Repeat with the other leg.

Tips and techniques:

- Stretch to the point of mild tension, not pain. You should not feel any pressure behind the knee or at your back.
- Keep your shoulders down and back.
- Breathe comfortably.

4. Floor hip flexor stretch



Primarily stretches the front of the hip

Repeat: 2–4 times

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your back with your legs extended on the floor.

Movement: Relax your shoulders against the floor. Bend your right knee. Rest your hands on the back of your thigh and pull your knee toward your chest. Flex your left foot and press the thigh and calf of that leg down toward the floor as you do so. Feel the stretch in the front of your left hip and top of your thigh. Hold. Return to the starting position and repeat with the other leg. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Stretch to the point of mild tension, not pain.
- When holding the stretch, remain as still as possible, without bouncing.

5. Double-knee torso rotation



Primarily stretches the back, chest, hip, and outer thigh

Repeat: 2–4 times

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet together, flat on the floor. Arms out comfortably to each side at shoulder level.

Movement: Tighten your abdominal muscles and lift both knees toward your chest, then lower them to the right side on the floor. Keeping your shoulders relaxed and pressed into the floor, look in the opposite direction.

Feel the stretch across your chest and torso. Hold. Bring both knees back to center and return your left foot, then your right foot, to the floor. Repeat in the opposite direction.

Tips and techniques:

- Stretch to the point of mild tension, not pain.
- If necessary, put a rolled towel between your knees to make this stretch easier.

6. Downward dog



Stretches the entire body

Repeat: 2–4 times

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Position yourself on all fours, hands shoulder-width apart, legs hip-width apart, and fingers extended.

Movement: Exhale as you lift your knees off the floor, straightening your legs without locking the knees until you are in an upside-down V. While maintaining a neutral neck and spine, align your ears with your biceps. Try to keep your weight evenly distributed between your hands and

feet. Press your heels down toward the floor while keeping your shoulders down and rolled back. Hold. Return to the starting position.

Tips and techniques:

- Soften your elbows and keep your shoulders down and rolled back as you lengthen your spine. Brace your abdominal muscles.
- If necessary, bend your knees slightly and let your heels come up off the floor.