

Safety First: Stretching

It is important to stretch before and after you participate in any physical activity. Stretching can lower your chance for injury and it helps to stay flexible as we get older. We've given a few general tips for stretching and show a few stretches you can do before and after your physical activity.



General Safety Tips For Stretching:

- Gently warm up for 5 minutes. Warm muscles are ready to be stretched, while cold muscles can become injured if we try to stretch them a long way. For example, think of your muscles like a rubber band. A warm rubber band is ready to stretch and goes back to its original shape when you let go. But a frozen rubber band may break when you try to stretch it too far.
- Don't "bounce." Instead, gently hold the stretch still for about 15-30 seconds each. Bouncing can raise your chance of pulling a muscle by asking your muscle to stretch too far, too fast, too soon.
- Avoid stretching your muscles far enough that they hurt. Instead, pull just hard enough to feel an easy stretch. When you let go, the muscle should feel relaxed, limber and pain free.
- Take your time and avoid holding your breath.

Calf Stretch:

The calf muscle is on the back of your leg, just above your ankle. Stretching this muscle can help you walk with more ease. You also use this muscle a lot when you go up stairs or stand on your tippy toes. Stretching your calf muscle can lower your risk of shin splints (pain on the front of the leg above your ankle).

1. Stand a little way from wall and lean on it with forearms, head resting on hands
2. Place right foot in front of you, leg bent, left leg straight behind you
3. Slowly move hips forward until you feel stretch in calf of left leg
4. Keep left heel flat and toes pointed straight ahead
5. Hold easy stretch 15 to 30 seconds
6. Repeat using your other leg

Calf Muscle Stretch



Stretches the thigh (quadriceps)

The quadriceps muscle is on the front of your leg, above your knee. It's often what people call their "thigh" muscle. Similar to your calf muscle, you use the quadriceps muscle when walking or going up stairs.

1. Find a wall or stable chair for support.
2. Using this support, stand as straight as possible and grasp the top of your left foot with right hand
3. Gently pull your heel toward your buttocks
4. Hold 15 to 30 seconds
5. Repeat using your other leg



Quadriceps
Muscle Stretch



If reaching down to grab your ankle is hard, you can use a towel or extra t-shirt to help.

Stretches back of leg and lower back

The hamstring muscle is on the back of your leg, just above your knee. You use this muscle a lot when you walk down hill or down stairs.

1. Stand with your knees bent slightly
2. Keeping your knees bent slightly, slowly bend forward at your hips toward your toes
3. Do not dip your head forward at start of stretch
4. Hold this 15 to 30 seconds
5. If it's difficult to balance, you can also do this stretch sitting in a chair.

Hamstring
Muscle Stretch



While seated in a chair, put 1 leg out and lean forward to your toes. You will feel a stretch in the back of your leg. Repeat using your other leg.