



15-MINUTE STRETCH

FOUR 15-MINUTE WORKOUTS FOR
FLEXIBILITY, POSTURE, AND STRENGTH

SUZANNE MARTIN





15-MINUTE STRETCH

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About this eBook

Due to the complex integration of images and text, this DK eBook has been formatted to retain the design of the print edition. As a result, all elements are fixed in place, but can easily be enlarged by using the pinch-to-zoom function.

If you are previewing this eBook on a mobile phone, portrait mode is recommended. If previewing on a tablet or larger display, landscape mode will allow you to see facing pages at the same time (two page view).

HEALTH WARNING

All participants in fitness activities must assume the responsibility for their own actions and safety. If you have any health problems or medical conditions, consult with your doctor before undertaking any of the activities set out in this book. The information contained in this book cannot replace sound judgment and good decision making, which can help reduce the risk of injury.



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AUTHOR FOREWORD



Here it is! Thanks to all of you who enjoyed my first Stretching book, and especially to those who contacted me to request more Stretching. And a special welcome if you are 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 the way your whole body looks, as well as providing pain relief and reducing stress.


Keep an open mind. Some of the instructions may seem proscriptive, 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 because they don't pay attention to their set-up.

The pictures and tips will help you get the exercise concepts clear in your mind, which, in turn, will help you organize the efforts in your body to achieve the greatest effect. This can take time, so be patient.

The stretches will reveal where your body needs help. Observe and compare one side to the other. Can you feel both sides “arranging themselves” into the movement? Is any body part talking to you? Follow the instructions, mimic the shapes, understand the cues, then take the movements farther. Internalize them until you can feel every bone in your body. Learn to compare how you are stretching today to how you did yesterday. Don’t compare your body with the model’s.

Learn to see your body as it is. The famous composer Stravinsky once said that once he knew the 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Suzanne Marti". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'D' and 'M'.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Stretch towards a new you! Each of the four programmes 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 stands by itself, but when done in sequence, there is a powerful cumulative effect. To start, read the introduction to each programme to get an idea of its theme. Next, try the programme 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 your own.

Certain stretches will be harder for some people than for others, depending on your experience and body type. Remember, there’s always an easier way, so use the modifications given in the FAQs and on pp100–101. Remember, too, that you need to do a variety of movements 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 video available at www.dk.com/15-minute-stretch is designed to be used with the book if you want to reinforce the exercises. As you watch the video, page references to the book flash up on screen. Refer to these for more detailed instruction.

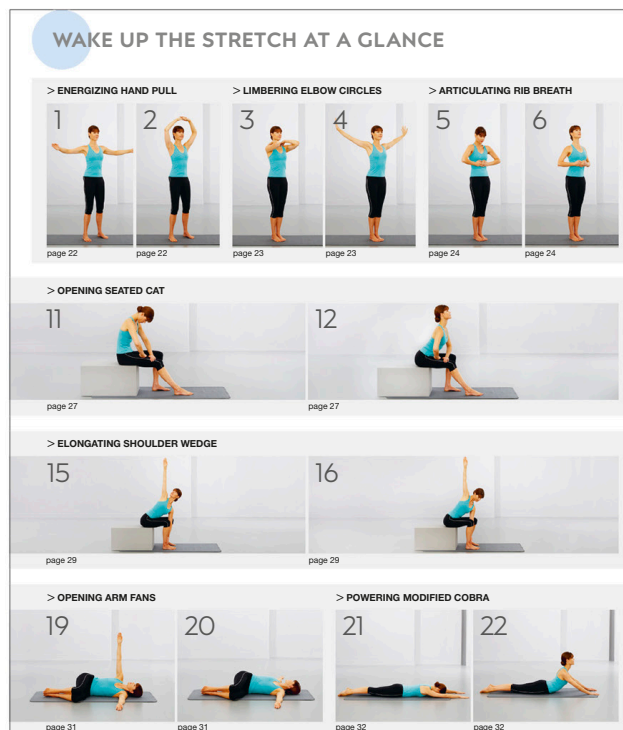
THE SUMMARIES

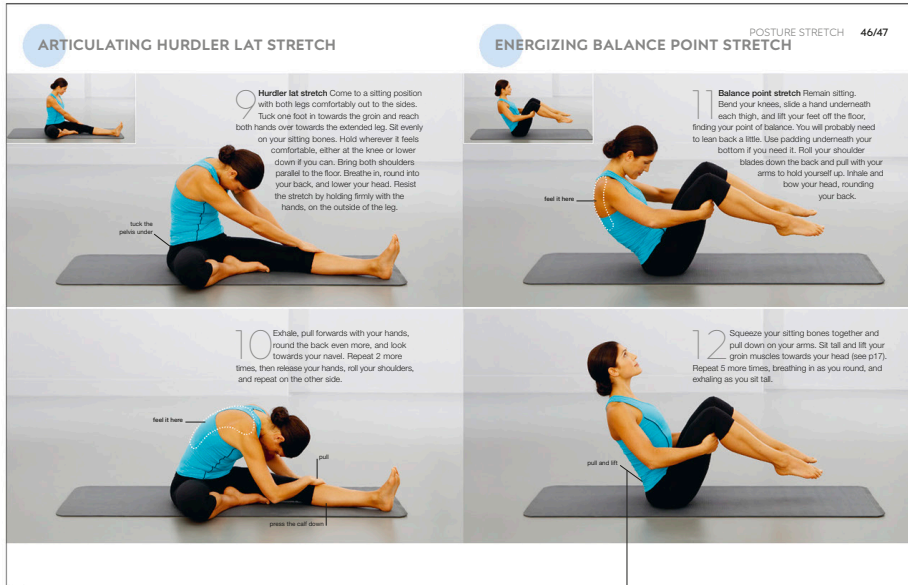
The summaries at the end of each sequence show you each stretch sequence as a whole. Once you’ve watched the video, and examined the modifications and tips for each exercise, the summary will help reinforce the sense of the sequence and gives you a quick at-a-glance reference. More importantly, when

working without the video, you can also use the summary to prolong a stretch and linger from stretch to stretch, embellishing and savouring each.

SAFETY ISSUES

Be sure to get clearance from your doctor or healthcare provider before you begin any new exercise programme. The advice and exercises in this book are not intended to be a substitute for individual medical help.





“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 summary shows all the exercises in the programme

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

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 here. 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, wraps around the muscles, and holds them close to the skeleton.

Think of it as 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 cupboard and made 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 re-occurring 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 programme 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 6.8kg (15lb), is also important. Tipping it in any direction activates an intricate system of overlapping muscles that both bind the head into the trunk and yet allow a marvellous 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 of muscles either side of the spine), and the muscles deep inside the rib cage (the diaphragm).

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.

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 centre of gravity. Anchoring this area provides a counterbalance to, and increased effectiveness for, each stretch.



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

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.

FLEXIBILITY AND POSTURE

Genetics dictate how flexible you are and also your postural body type.

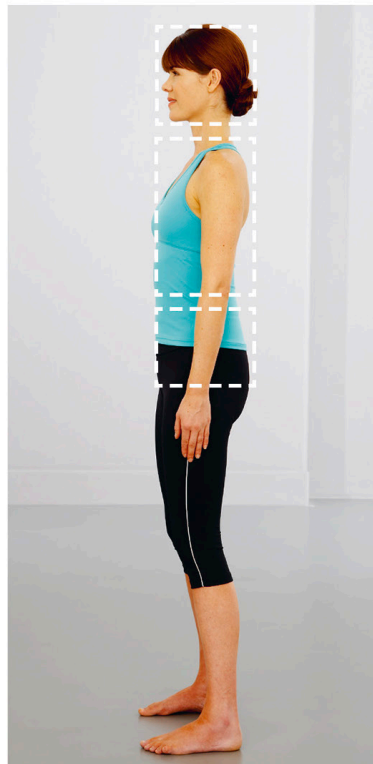
Stiffness and over-flexibility both cause aches, pains, and difficulty in day-to-day activities. Explore your flexibility with these easy tests, and strive to find your best neutral posture.

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.

Practising sitting and standing tall also solidifies your intent to push vertically upwards against the force of gravity. The beauty of this formula is that it applies to all body types and levels of flexibility, even people who are naturally flexible.



Gravity breaks us into unbalanced segments (far left). The head falls forwards. 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.

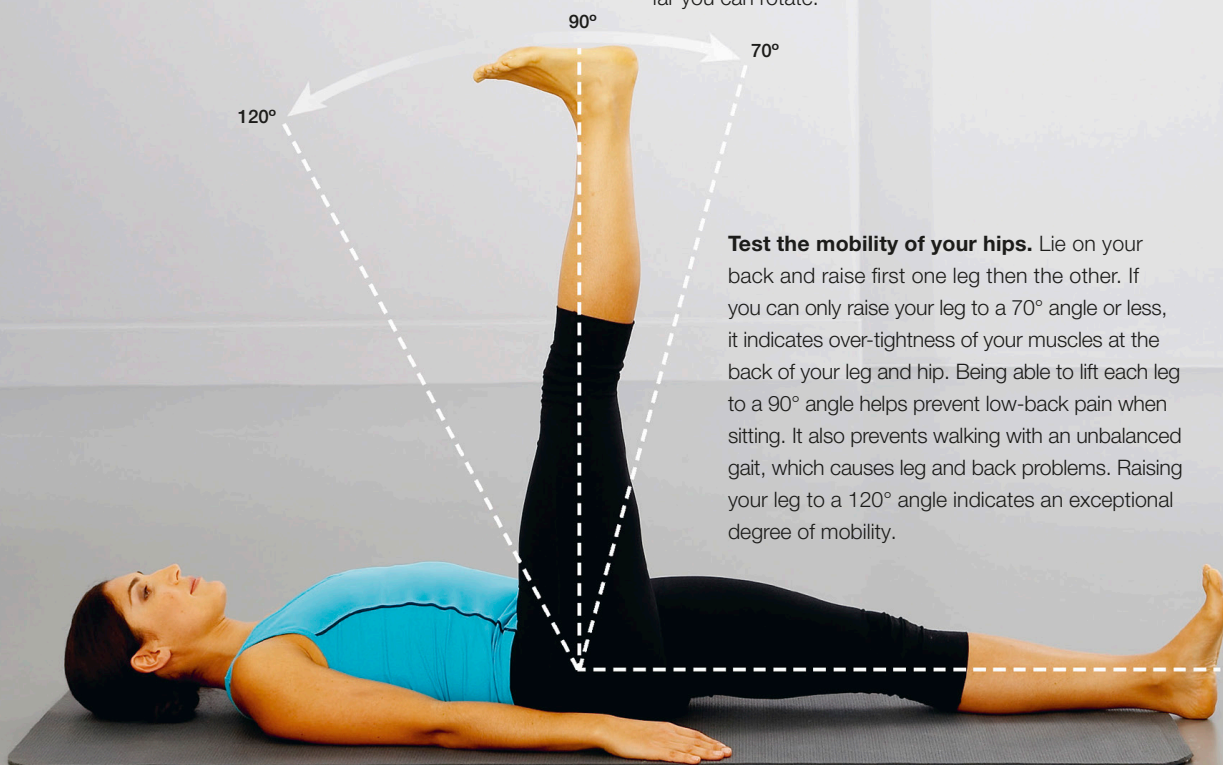
The goal is to balance the segments and achieve neutral posture, with a straight line running from the head through the pelvis (left). Note especially how the weight of the heavy head is now balanced directly over the pelvis, which houses our centre of gravity. This alignment puts the least amount of strain on the spine as well as on 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 are 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 visualization to help us make our exercise more effective.

The programmes 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 upwards 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 gives 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 your abdomen deepens abdominal connections. Visualizing “smile lines” stabilizes your pelvis and brings precision to hip stretches.





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

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

Lift your groin. The floor of your pelvis should be buoyed upwards, just as a parachute fills with air. Feel the movement, like a lift ascending up your spine towards your head.

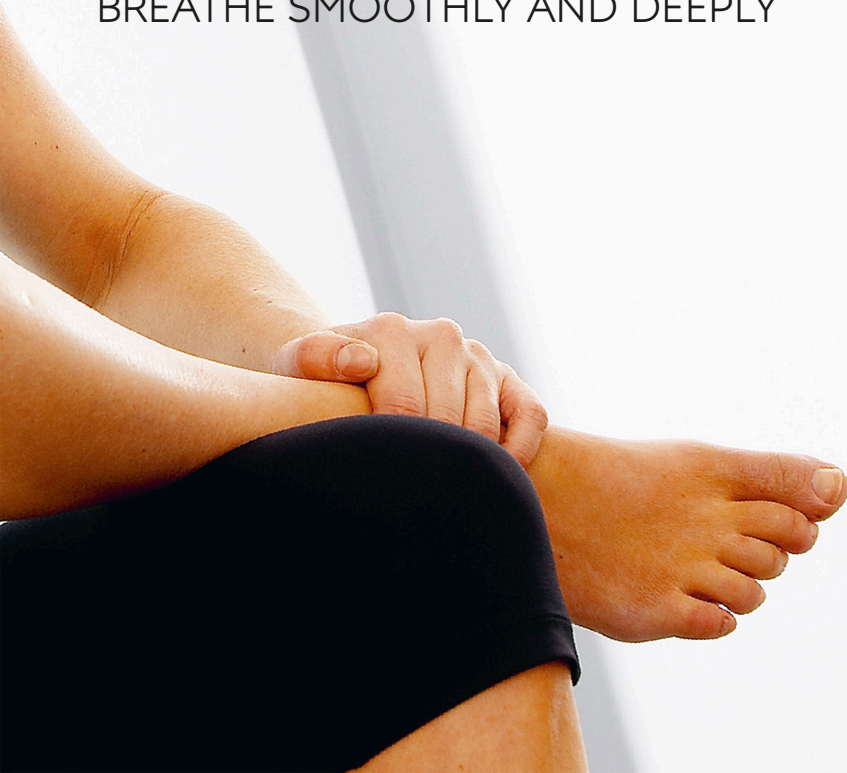


15 MINUTE



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 where your deep muscles are, 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 sitting bones. 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.

At 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 outwards. Lift your groin muscles towards the head (see p17) and firm your hips. Slowly exhale as you open your arms to the sides, turning your palms forwards.



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

WAKE UP THE STRETCH 22/23



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



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 towards the head and stand tall. Then inhale and bring the elbows forwards, 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 upwards. Allow your elbows to come backwards. Repeat 2 more times, inhaling as you bring the elbows forwards, 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

WAKE UP THE STRETCH 24/25



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 towards your body.



8 Intensify the stretch by bending the knee slightly on the side of the raised hand and by looking down towards the lower hand. Feel as if someone is pulling your third finger to the ceiling. Then exhale, straighten the knee, and slowly turn your face forwards. Repeat, then change sides and repeat 2 times on the other side.

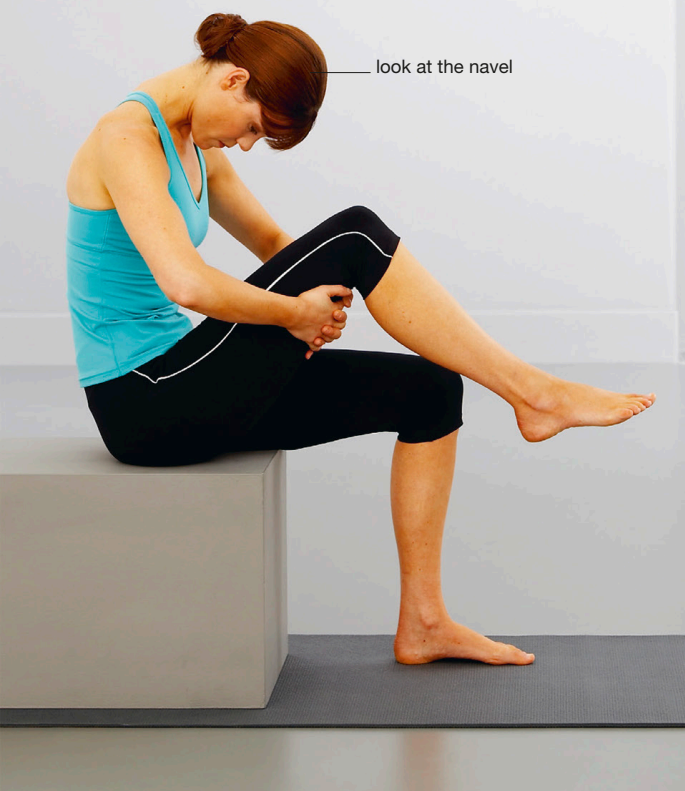
Let your arm come down and relax.



LENGTHENING LIFT & BOW



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



10 Exhale and reverse, lifting your chest and face diagonally up towards 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

WAKE UP THE STRETCH 26/27

11 Seated cat Remain sitting towards 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.



press the toes down

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 towards the ceiling. Inhale, round, and repeat, then repeat the whole stretch on the other side. Roll your shoulders and release.



lift the chest

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 towards the head, lengthen your spine, and bow your head towards your knee.



14 Exhale, lift your chest, and turn your torso towards 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 towards 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 towards your navel.



18 Exhale, lengthen your back, then sway your hips and head towards each other. Repeat on the other side, always inhaling as you round your back and exhaling as you take your hips and head towards 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 towards 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 towards the ceiling, creating a rainbow shape.

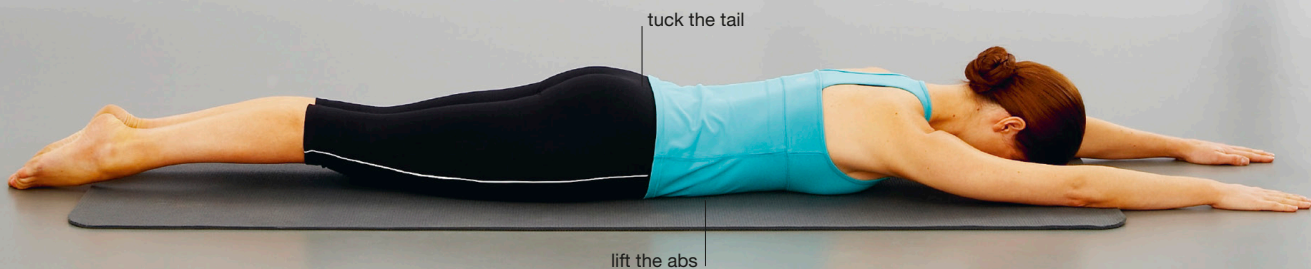


20 Continue moving the arm and reach behind you to the floor, allowing your shoulders and torso to rotate with the arm. Try not to move your knees. Exhale, then reach up with the hand as you reverse, “painting the ceiling” with your fingertips until your hands are together again. Repeat 2 more times,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

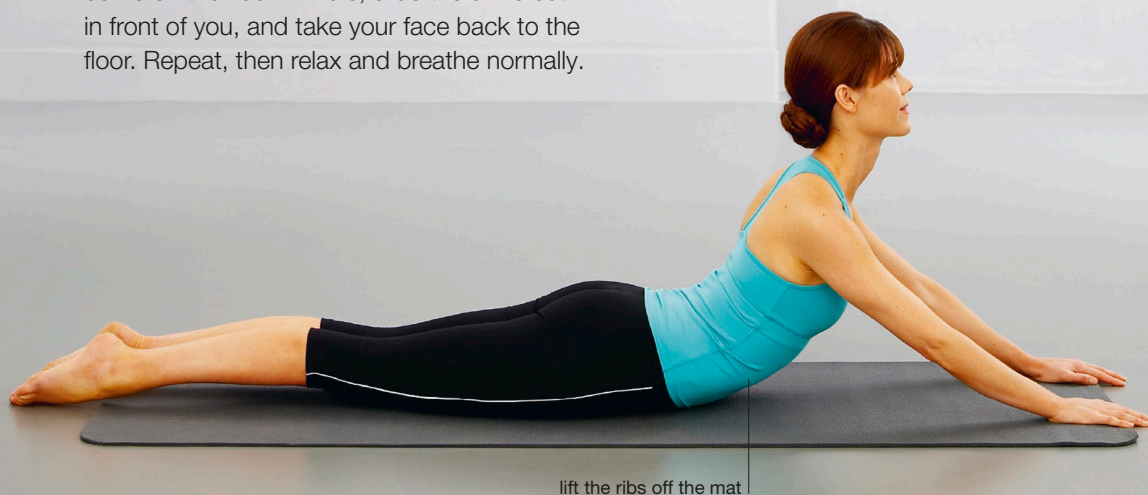


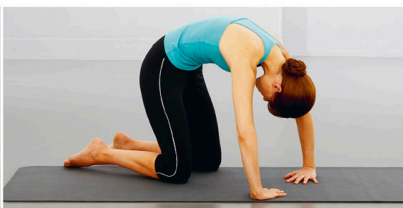
POWERING MODIFIED COBRA

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 towards 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 towards 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.





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 towards each other, then inhale and reach one shoulder down towards the opposite hand.



24 Sweep the chest across the floor, past centre towards 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 AT A GLANCE

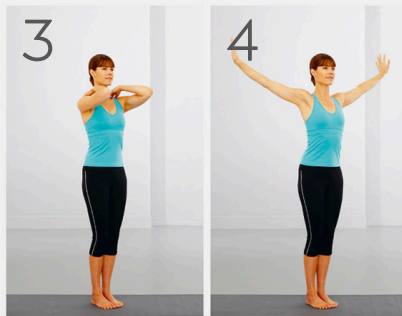
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> ELONGATING SHOULDER WEDGE

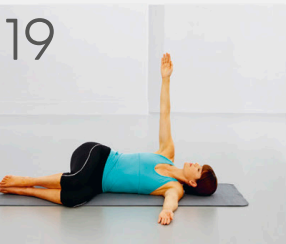


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> LENGTHENING SHOULDER OVALS



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WAKE UP THE STRETCH FAQs

The Wake up the stretch programme is excellent for beginners as well as for someone looking for a lighter, more gentle stretch. During this first programme, 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 your 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 dome-like 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 upwards 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 TOWARDS 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 MUCH FARTHER OFF 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. Honour 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 end point.

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 slowly. 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 wiggle around 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 CENTRE

ELONGATE YOUR WAIST

EXTEND UP AGAINST THE FORCE OF GRAVITY

POSTURE STRETCH

We all want healthy posture. Although we live in an imperfect world, nearly perfect posture can be achieved by methodically balancing our body against gravity's pull. Where the body leads, the mind goes. Improving posture will lift 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-centre 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 neuro-developmental sequence – in other words, the basic movement patterns that get a baby from lying down to standing and walking. The Posture stretch sequence uses all the positions that babies must achieve on their journey to walking.

Starting with exercises lying on the back, trunk control is developed which enables optimum control

TIPS FOR POSTURE STRETCH

- **Focus on the ultimate goal** of elongating your entire body in every exercise.
- **Notice how each exercise builds** towards 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 centre of gravity in the pelvic bowl.

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 foetal 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 upwards 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 your body, counteracting hip tightness from prolonged sitting and the slump and fatigue associated with prolonged standing.



CENTRING ELONGATIONS

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.



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 towards 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 towards the opposite side, sliding your upper body slightly along the floor in the same direction.



6 At the same time, cross the leg opposite 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 the centre, 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 towards 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 towards the floor, and rock towards that side. Then, exhale and release to return to centre. 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 towards the groin and reach both hands over towards the extended leg. Sit evenly on your sitting bones. 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 forwards with your hands, round the back even more, and look towards 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 sitting bones together and pull down on your arms. Sit tall and lift your groin muscles towards 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 towards your head, and lift your ears towards the ceiling. Inhale, lifting your abs as you rotate the hips forwards. Look towards your feet.



14 Exhale. Tighten and firm the hips as you roll them backwards. Repeat 2 more times, inhaling as you rotate the hips forwards, 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 forwards. 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.



feel it here

firm the hips

keep the feet on the floor

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



COORDINATING LUNGE OPENER



17 Lunge opener Come onto your hands and knees. Reach one foot forwards, take the other leg back, and lean onto the front leg. Lift the groin muscles towards 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 forwards 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 towards your heels, then lean more into your hands, place your palms on the floor, and inhale as you lift the hips upwards 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 towards the heels again, still keeping your head down. Repeat 2 more times.

tuck the tail in

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.

take the feet
a hand-width
apart



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.

keep the
tail tucked in



stay on the
front leg

CENTRING 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 towards 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

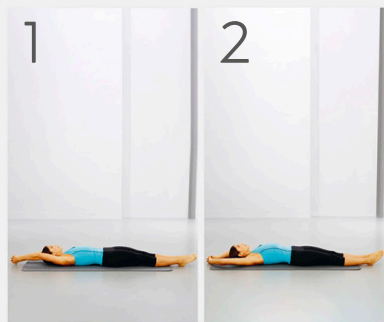
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Lower your arms and shake them gently to release the tension.

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

POSTURE STRETCH AT A GLANCE

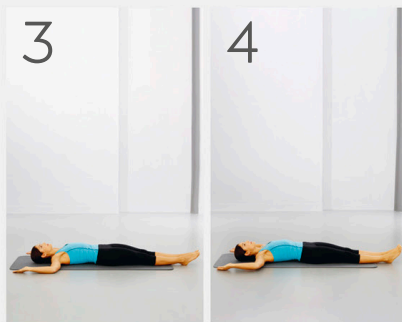
> CENTRING ELONGATIONS



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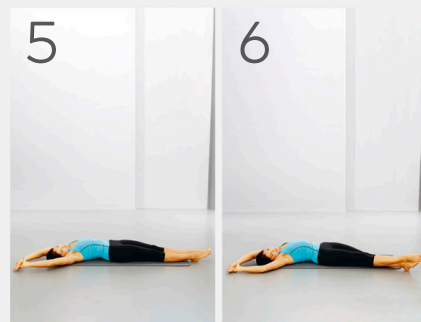
> STABILIZING "W'S"



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> ACCENTUATING "C" STRETCH



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> ENERGIZING BALANCE POINT STRETCH



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> OPENING FRONT BODY OPENER

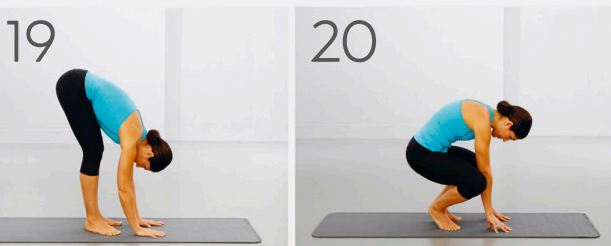


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> LIMBERING ROUND BACK SQUAT



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> ELONGATING HANGING STRETCH



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> SOFTENING BABY ROCKS

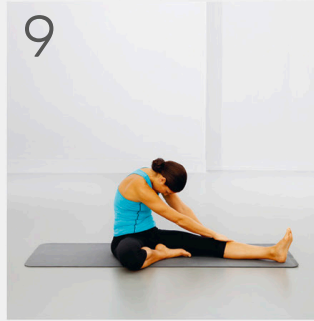


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> ARTICULATING HURDLER LAT STRETCH



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> CENTRING TOP-TO-TOE STRETCH



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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 wake up, 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 towards your head. Press your hips forwards. 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 towards the ceiling. Use your hands to twist your hips in relation to your 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 your spine moving in turn – your neck, your upper back, your 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 forwards 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, amongst 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. Take heart. Challenging yourself with many different exercises will help you to identify your weak areas. There is always a back door into a movement – a way in which you can break the movement 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 regime. Go slowly at first and take care to

TIPS FOR FLEXIBILITY STRETCH

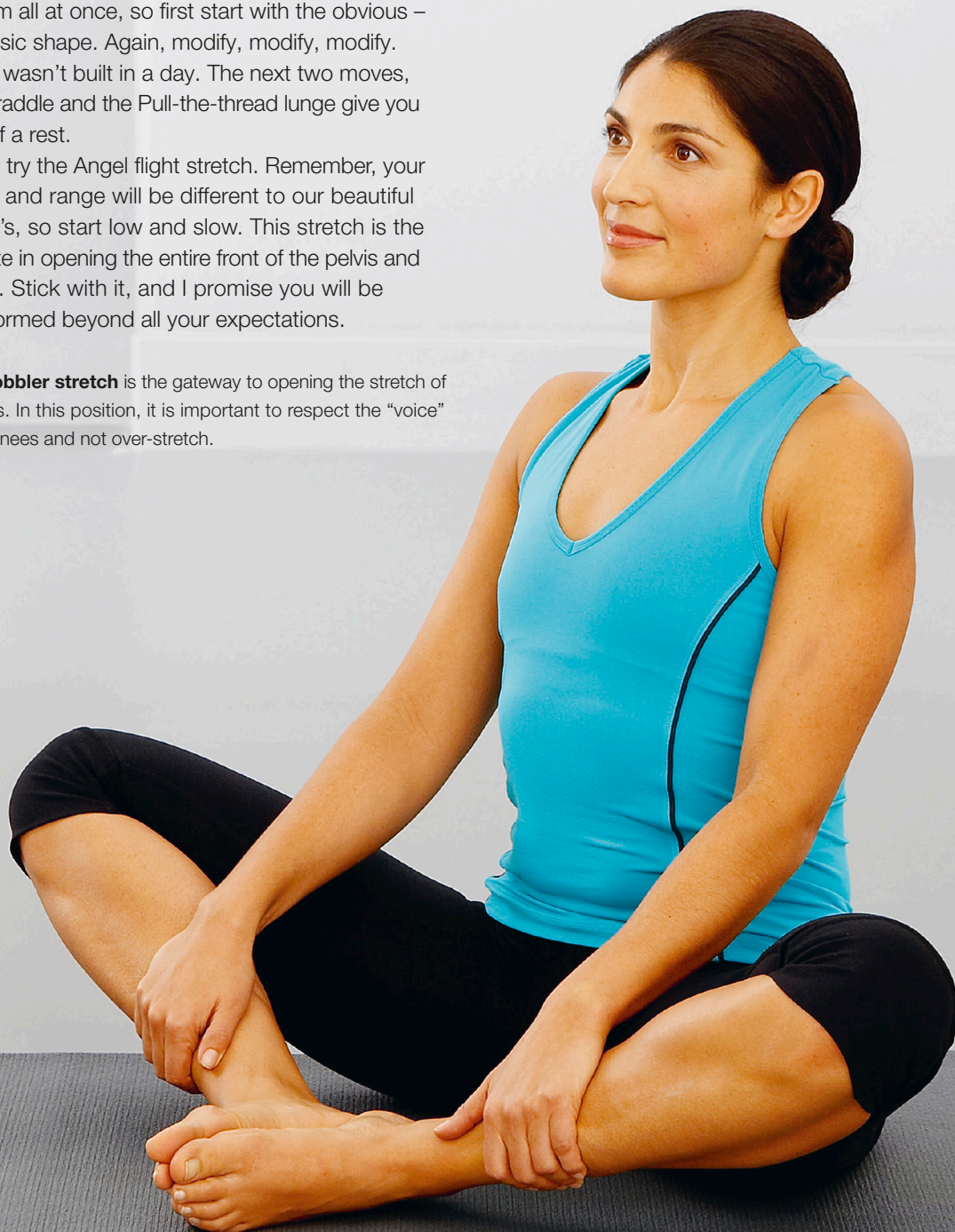
- **Suspend judgment** about your hip and leg stretch. Slow, steady persistence pays off. Look to yourself, and in yourself, for comparison.
- **Be sure to energize** your upper body as well as your lower body to create the necessary full-body connection.
- **Always use straps**, belts, or bands to modify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

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 the movements 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 to 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 be transformed 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



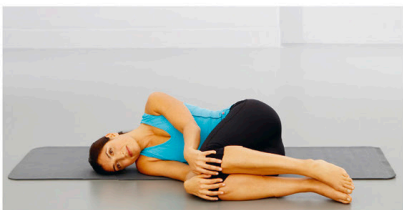
Knee pumps Lie on your back with the soles of your feet on the floor. Lift one foot and hold behind your thigh. Cup and hold the back of your head with the other hand. Inhale as you tuck your chin in and slightly lift your head and shoulders. Press your head into your hand. At the same time, straighten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

2 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

FLEXIBILITY STRETCH 62/63



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 from 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 p101). Inhale and lift the shoulders, then slump and round your back, allowing your knees to lift.



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



ARTICULATING QUAD STRETCH



7 Quad stretch Lie on your side and bend both knees up towards your chest. Hold onto your bottom knee. Use a pillow under your neck if you feel any strain (see p101). Inhale, hold onto your top ankle and pull your top knee gently towards your chest.



8 Exhale, then smoothly pull your top knee back. Do not let the bottom knee be pulled backwards by the top leg. Stay, then pull backwards 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.



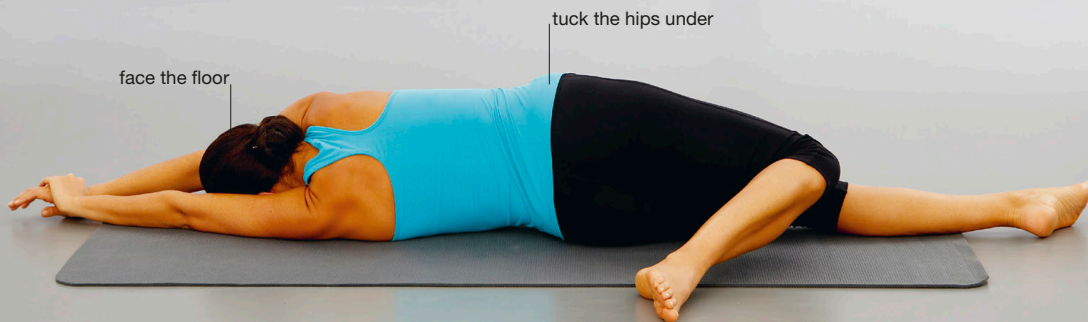
ELONGATING THIGH SWEEP



9 Thigh sweep Take your arms overhead on the floor and bend your top knee backwards. 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 backwards towards the floor. Do not force it, and 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 forwards towards the floor. Repeat, inhaling as you roll backwards and exhaling as you roll forwards.



STIMULATING FOUETTÉ STRETCH



reach the head
away from the foot

feel it here

feel it here

Fouetté stretch Still lying on your side, reach your top leg and foot towards 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 the floor. Lift your groin muscles towards 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 forwards.



pull the leg
into the hip

press the calf into the floor

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

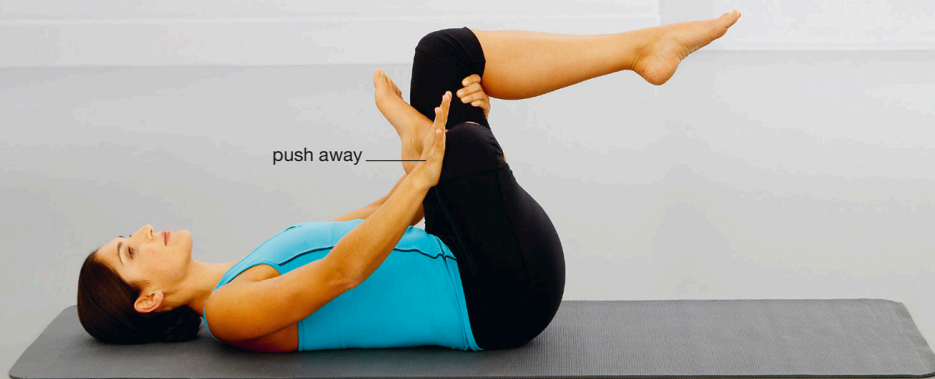
BALANCING FIGURE 4 STRETCH



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 towards the head to stabilize the spine. Inhale and pull the hand behind the thigh towards 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

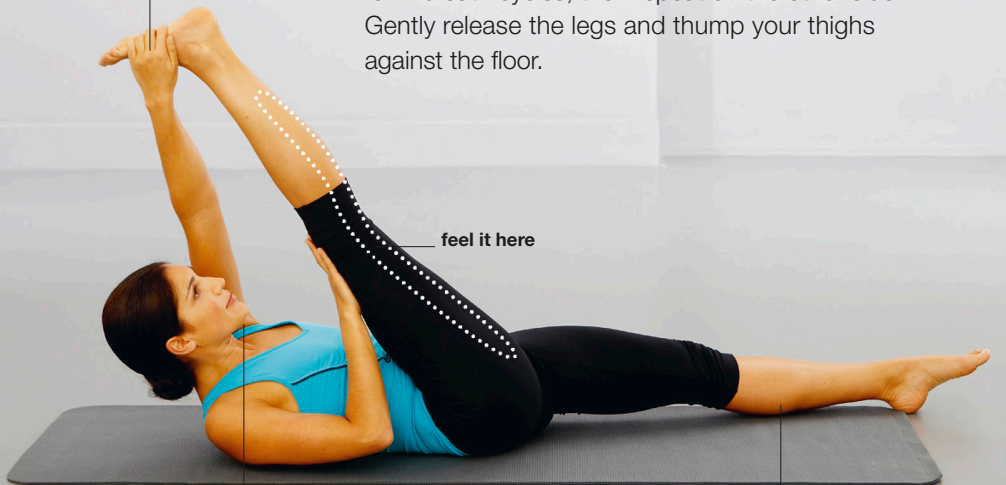


15 Lying hamstring stretch Still lying on your back, bend both knees, anchor your pelvis to the floor, lift your groin muscles towards your head, and pull your navel to your spine. Exhale, press your back into the floor, and lift one leg to the ceiling. Take the opposite hand to the lifted leg and hold 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. your glutes and press your hips forwards.



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



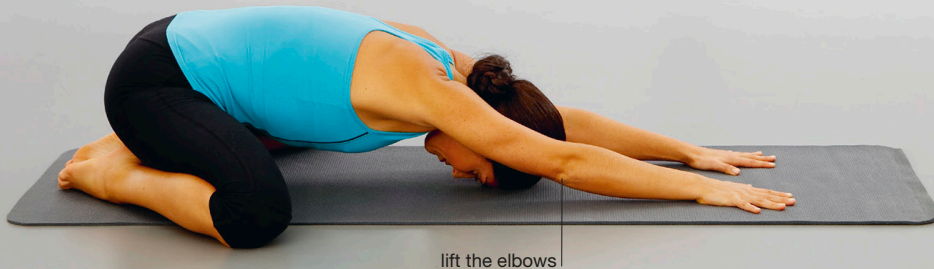
feel it here

tuck the chin in

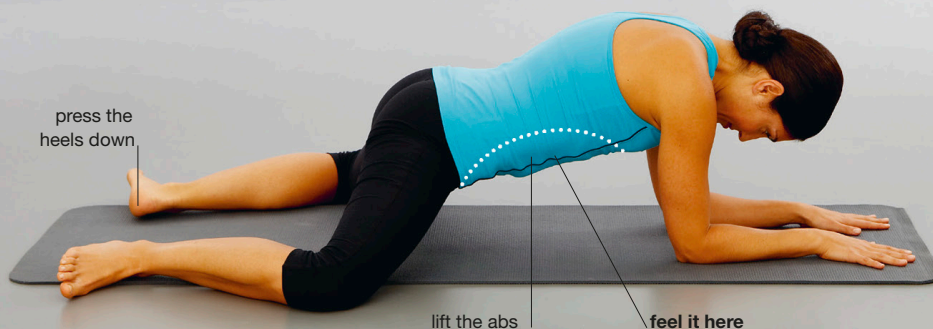
press the calf into the floor

ACCENTUATING ADVANCING FROGS

17 Advancing frogs Come onto your hands and knees, open your knees, reach your arms forwards, 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 forwards, 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 towards 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 sitting bones, with your legs open to at least a 90° angle, and with your toes pulled towards 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 towards the head. Open your arms strongly sideways and reach out through the head, legs, and arms. Straighten the bottom leg, pressing the calf down to the floor. your glutes and press your hips forwards.



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 centre 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

22 **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.

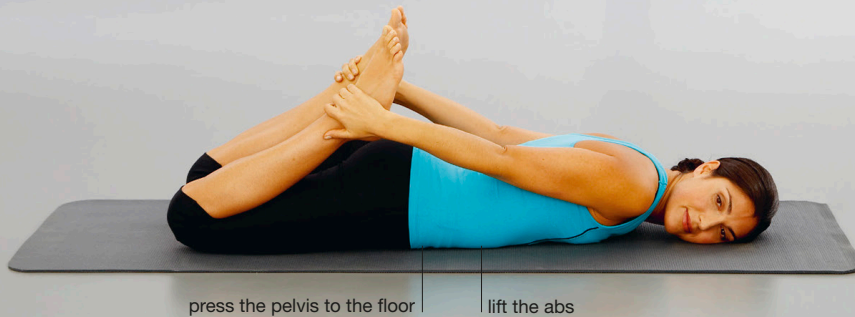


22 Pull an imaginary thread up to the ceiling with the hand on the side of the extended leg. Look up at the hand and press down into the floor with the other hand. Stay for 2 breath cycles. Take the hand down to the floor, then repeat with the other leg in front.



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 towards 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 bow-like shape. Stay for 2 breath cycles, then release your hands and feet and relax for another 2 breath cycles, breathing deeply.



FLEXIBILITY STRETCH AT A GLANCE

> LIMBERING KNEE PUMPS

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> ENERGIZING BABY ROLLS

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> ELONGATING COBBLER STRETCH

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> STIMULATING FOUETTÉ STRETCH

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> COORDINATING LYING HAMSTRING STRETCH

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> LENGTHENING STRADDLE

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> STABILIZING PULL-THE-THREAD LUNGE

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> ARTICULATING QUAD STRETCH

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> ELONGATING THIGH SWEEP

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> BALANCING FIGURE 4 STRETCH

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> ACCENTUATING ADVANCING FROGS

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> POWERING ANGEL FLIGHT STRETCH

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FLEXIBILITY STRETCH FAQs

This programme 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 cling film (see pp10–11).

WHY DO I HAVE TO HOLD ONTO THE BOTTOM KNEE IN THE QUAD STRETCH?

Holding the bottom knee ensures the stretch is being directed into the front of the hip joint and not into the waistline. 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 backwards. 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 forwards as you pull on the wrist, turning your chest forwards 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 yoga belt can come in handy. A dressing-gown belt also works well. Loop the belt around your foot and hold it with the hand on the opposite side. Do press your other hand against the thigh of the lifted leg, even if you cannot straighten that 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 your knees, not on top of your kneecaps. You should feel the stretch deep in the innermost fold of your leg at the groin. Be sure to keep your waist lifted since that takes pressure off your inner thigh. Use your hands and forearms to direct the pressure back and down towards your inner thigh.

15 MINUTE

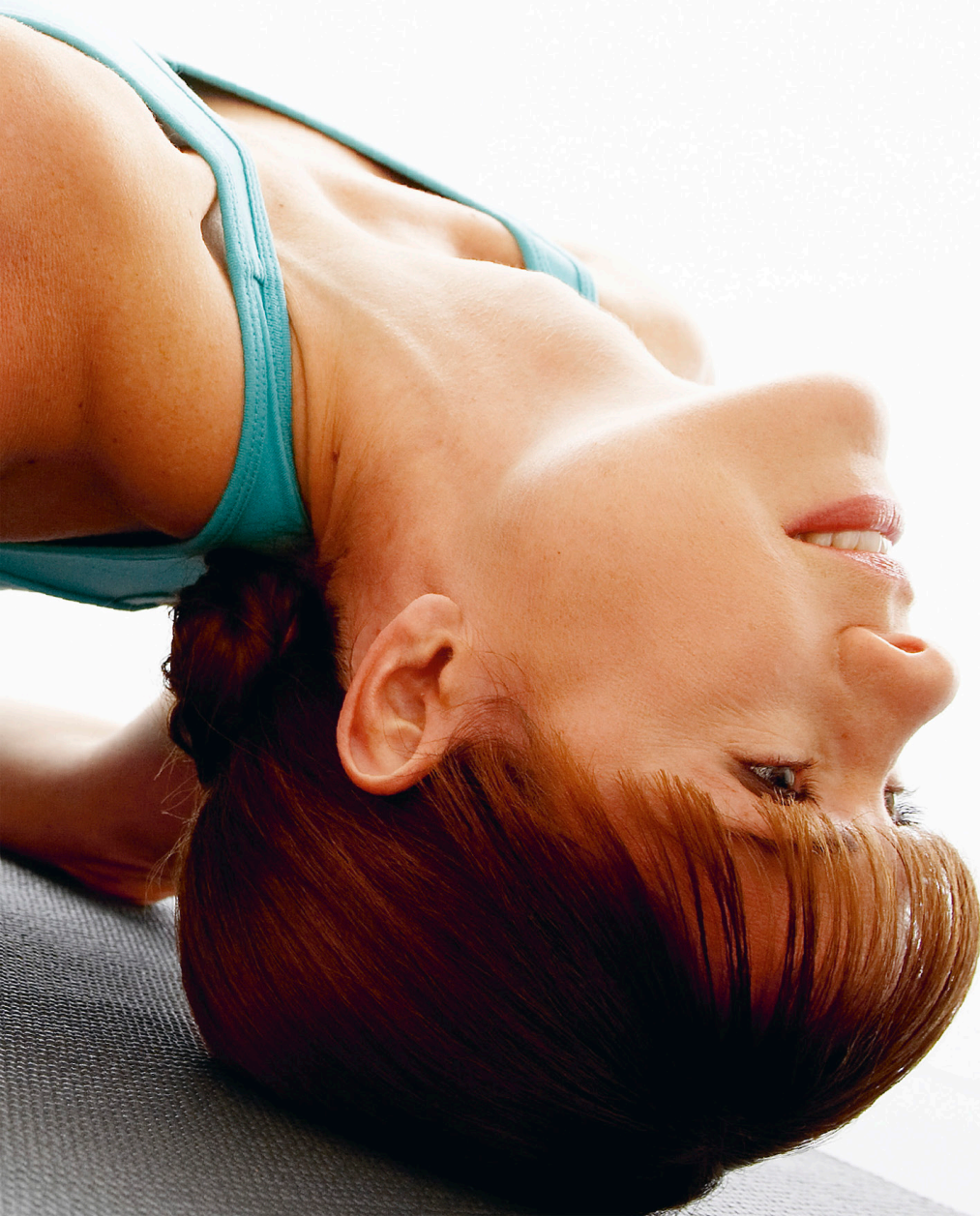


STRENGTH STRETCH

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, you can see the suppleness of an athlete's body, and in action you can see the lighthness 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 wise and give your body a good rest after practising this sequence. The poses and movements here move towards 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 you can in the Wide squat twist and in the Deep squat.

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 help you 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.

These squats also provide a great opportunity to strengthen the "pelvic diaphragm" – the parachute-like muscle layer that lies at the bottom of the torso.

As you perform the next exercise, the Neck stretch, bear in mind that you are now coordinating the "neck diaphragm" – the parachute-like 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. Keep your eyes on the prize, which is the combination of stretch with control. Fulfil 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 towards the head (see p17). Pull your navel to your spine (see p17). Clasp your hands behind your head, inhale, and lift up and forwards from your waist. Simultaneously bow your head, bend your knees, and bring the elbows towards each other.



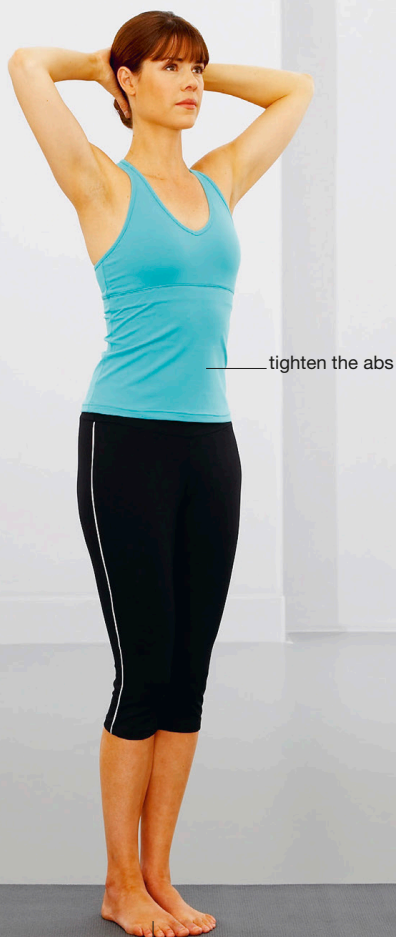
2 Exhale, straighten the legs, and stretch up and out of your waist, fanning the elbows open. Reach out through the points of the elbows and feel as if your breastbone is being pulled up towards the ceiling. Repeat, then relax and shake the hands.



anchor the feet

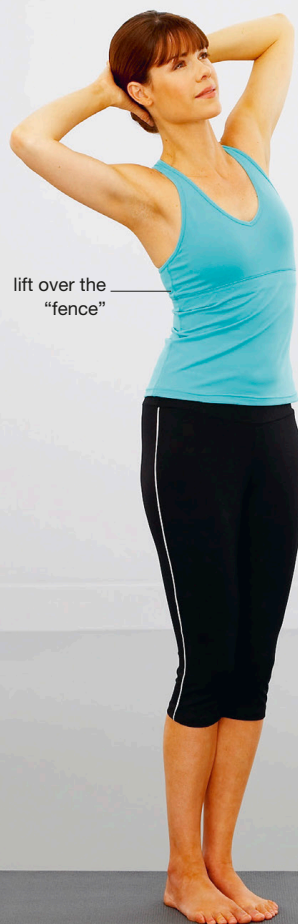
OPENING UPPER SIDE BEND

3 Upper side bend Still with your legs completely together, renew your form. Lift the groin muscles towards 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 towards the floor, the other up towards the ceiling. Exhale and take your shoulders back to centre. 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 Wide squat twist Come to a standing position with your feet wider than hip-width apart and your toes facing outwards. Lift the groin muscles towards 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.



STIMULATING WIDE SQUAT TWIST



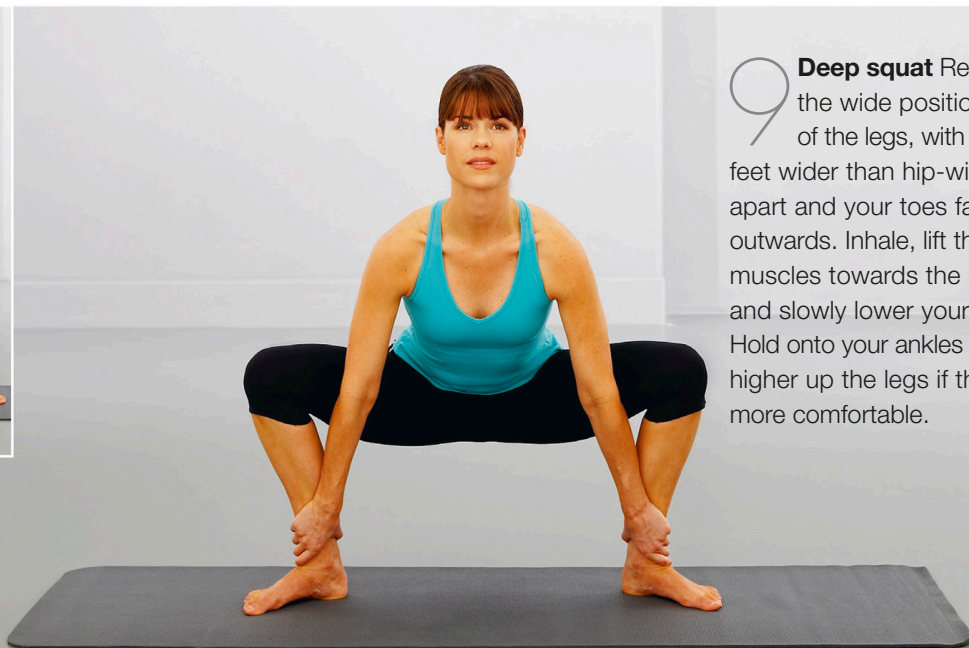
7 Upper side bend Still with your legs completely together, renew your form. Lift the groin muscles towards the head, and pull the abs up and into your spine. Clasp your hands behind your head.



8 Inhale, press backwards 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 centre. Come up, shake your legs a little, and repeat on the other side.



SUSTAINING DEEP SQUAT

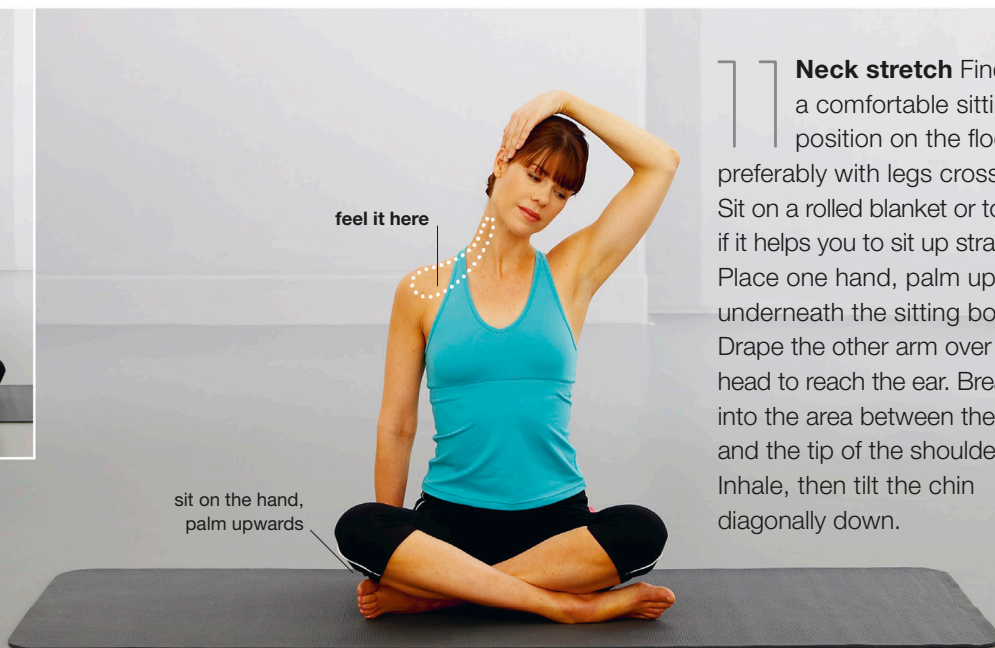
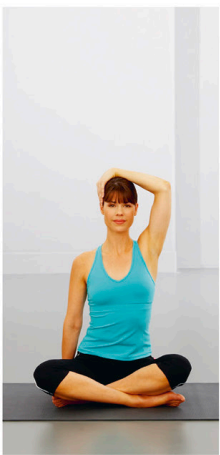


9 Deep squat Resume the wide position of the legs, with your feet wider than hip-width apart and your toes facing outwards. Inhale, lift the groin muscles towards the head and slowly lower your hips. Hold onto your ankles or hold higher up the legs if that is more comfortable.



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



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 upwards and lift the eye focus. Breathe into the new area of tightness in your neck to release it. Carefully turn the face forwards, 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 forwards 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 towards the back leg. Inhale, round the back, and look at the navel.



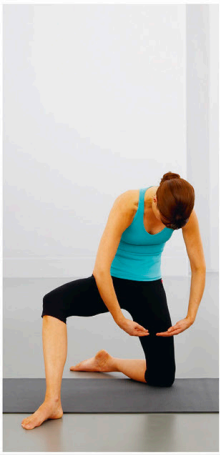
14 Open your mouth, exhale from the back of the throat, lengthen your low back, then start arching your back and lifting your chest. Imagine you are looking under a table. Repeat, inhaling and rounding, and exhaling and arching. Repeat on the other side.



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 third 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 towards 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 towards the head. Stay for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.



CENTRING 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 forwards 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 forwards 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 towards 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 forwards. Your legs should make a letter “Z” with your front foot touching the back knee. Place your hands on the floor in front of you. Straighten the back leg behind you, with the knee pointing towards the floor. Lift your groin muscles towards 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, then 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 towards your head and pull your navel to your spine. Lean on your hands.

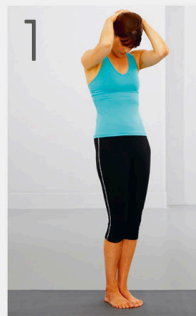


24 Switch legs, resume the “Z” sit, lengthen the back leg behind you, and renew your form. Find your balance, reach your hands behind you, clasp them, and try to straighten your elbows. If you prefer, you can stay with hands at your sides for balance. Stay for 2 breath cycles, then release. Come onto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

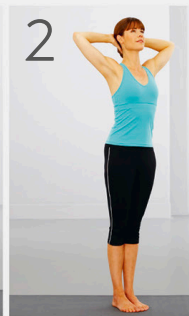


STRENGTH STRETCH AT A GLANCE

> LIMBERING BUTTERFLY STRETCH



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> OPENING UPPER SIDE BEND

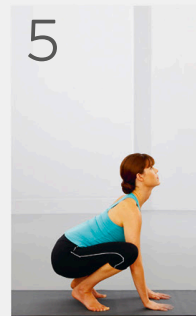


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> LENGTHENING FLAT BACK SQUAT



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> ARTICULATING NECK STRETCH



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> BALANCING KNEELING SIDE STRETCH



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> POWERING THIGH LUNGE

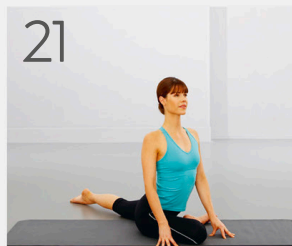


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> COORDINATING PIGEON ARABESQUE



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> STIMULATING WIDE SQUAT TWIST



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> SUSTAINING DEEP SQUAT



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> ELONGATING KNEELING CAT



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> CENTRING FISH STRETCH



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> ENERGIZING THE SPLIT



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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 your head; let gravity and the simple weight of your arm do the work. Over time your neck will open up. This is an exercise that really 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 your 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 towards the front leg. Be sure to keep your hips moving backwards, especially as you lift your chest upwards. Another tip is to literally stick your buttocks back and up, trying to arch your low back as you lift your chest. Yet another tip is to keep your chest as low as possible to your 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. Practise 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 non-collapsed 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
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 footstool, ottoman, towel, or bolster can give just the lift needed to make the stretch possible.

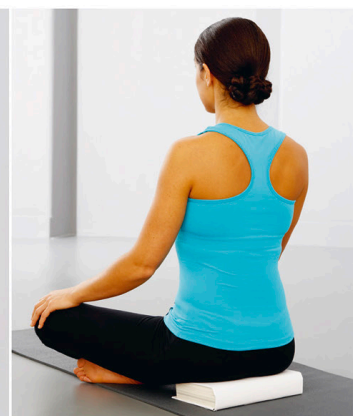
Knees should never hurt during stretching. If they feel painful, support them on pillows or bolsters to take the pressure off. Another tip for this pose is to move the feet farther away from the groin.



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 p69), 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 so well. A book under the pelvis (right, above) will help you to sit forwards on the sitting bones. A rolled towel placed under the head straightens the neck and helps you avoid neck pain (right, centre). 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 yourself, 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 trousers. Does the task feel comfortable? Do you have the same range of motion on both sides? 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 non-dominant hand to balance both sides 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 before.

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 movements – 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 taking exercise, but not everyone can do that. Our 15-minute programmes make it possible to 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 rich dividends.



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 programme (see pp26–29). Reach your hands behind your head and wing your elbows open in a chest stretch. It helps your work day go faster and more smoothly. Sitting work is probably among 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 over-use 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 upwards to open the chest and neck.
- **Stretch your legs and hips** when putting on and taking off clothes. Practise 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 your 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 favourite

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, savour a cup of a caffeine-free drink for an uninterrupted night's sleep. 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. Try 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 over-analytical thoughts. For instance, tense the fists as you count to ten, then relax them. In order of progression, apply the same



Practise 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.

tense-then-relax method to the shoulders, thighs, calves, feet, 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 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 programmes 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 fruit and vegetables and about three 85g (3oz) 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 humour adds play into the day. Nurture your rest and sleep habits (see p104). 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 of discouragement

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 fruit or vegetables. Then split the other half between a protein and a serving of starch.
- **Balance work with play.** Find a hobby and develop your sense of humour. 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".

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 to master things beyond your regular routine. Taking your stretching to another level – perhaps by joining a yoga class – will challenge you to go further 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 towards your health care will pay off royally. A comprehensive programme 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.

THE UK

GENERAL FITNESS

National Register of Personal Trainers

www.nrpt.co.uk

Tel: 0870 200 6010

A register of professional trainers. Enables you to find a qualified, experienced, and insured personal trainer in the UK.

NHS

www.nhs.uk

Offers a postcode-based search option to help you find local sport and fitness services. Also has a link to the online *Live Well* magazine with a wide variety of general health features.

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

csp.org.uk

The professional, educational and trade union body for the UK's chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and assistants. Their Physio2u directory will help you find a

chartered physiotherapist who offers private services.

PILATES

Pilates.co.uk

www.pilates.co.uk

A comprehensive website dedicated to the Pilates method, with links to a directory to help you find your nearest Pilates studio or class where you can practise Pilates under the guidance of qualified instructors.

The PILATESfoundation® UK

www.pilatesfoundation.com

A not-for-profit professional Pilates organization in the UK, dedicated to ensuring the highest standards of certification training, continuing education, and code of conduct. Has a useful website that is designed to help you find out information about Pilates teachers in your area, as well as supplying information on all aspects of Pilates.

YOGA

Iyengar Yoga Association

www.iyengaryoga.org.uk

This method of yoga is initially learnt through the in-depth study of asanas (posture) and pranayama (breath control). Mr Iyengar systematized over 200 classical yoga asanas and 14 different types of pranayamas, 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. This website will help you find a local teacher.

Ashtanga Yoga Institute

kpjayshala.com

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. Follow the links to find teachers in the UK.

Anusara Yoga

anusarayoga.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™. Follow the links to find teachers in the UK.

NUTRITION**Food Standards Agency**

www.food.gov.uk

Independent government department that exists to protect public health and consumer interests.

British Nutrition Foundation

www.nutrition.org.uk

The website provides healthy eating information, news items, and recipes.

CLOTHING**Sweaty Betty**

sweatybetty.com

Founded in 1998 by Tamara Hill-Norton, Sweaty Betty sells gorgeous clothing for active and not-so-active women in boutiques nationwide and online.

AUSTRALIA**PILATES****Australian Pilates Method Association**

australianpilates.asn.au

A not-for-profit organization aimed both at teachers and those wanting to practise Pilates, including training, workshops, instructor membership and information on how to find a Pilates instructor in your area.

HELP WITH PAIN**Pain Australia**

painaustralia.org.au

Australia's leading pain advocacy body, who work to improve the quality of life of people living with pain, their families and carers. The website offers several apps that can be used to help you better understand and manage your pain.

To contact Suzanne Martin

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