

# IMPROVING FLEXIBILITY THROUGH PROPER STRETCHING

Flexibility is a major health-related component of fitness. Stretching exercises help to improve or maintain flexibility. People who are inflexible (especially in the front and back of the thigh) are more prone to lower back pain. Therefore, a stretching routine will help you maintain or improve your current flexibility so you feel great!

## BEFORE YOU STRETCH

Current research on stretching has shown that a warmup before doing any of the following stretches is essential! In fact, if you do not warm up before you stretch you can even hurt yourself! To warm up, simply do some large muscle activities (like running in place or walking briskly) until you "break a sweat". When you are at this point, you may begin stretching.

## BUT FIRST

Remember that your muscles are very smart. If you bounce while you are stretching, your muscles will not allow you to stretch. They will be nervous that you are going to hurt them, so they will contract and not allow a stretch to take place. You cannot control this response because it is a reflex. So, make sure you take a stretch to the point of tension (not pain) and then hold that position for approximately 20-30 seconds. Always listen to your body - if it hurts, you are stretching too far! Stretching is most effective following a workout because the body is completely warm. The stretching done before a workout will help to prevent muscle and joint injuries.

- **INNER THIGH STRETCH:** Sit up tall and let your knees relax with feet together. Always stretch with proper posture, which means keeping the chin up.



- **OUTER THIGH STRETCH:** Cross one leg over the other leg and hold. If you cannot feel this stretch, sit up while keeping the legs crossed.



- **ABDOMINAL STRETCH:** Lying on your stomach, lift your upper body up while resting most of your weight on your elbows. This is an essential stretch for those of us that sit at a desk all day. This stretch will help to counteract the effects of daily living and help improve posture.



- **UPPER BACK STRETCH:** While on your hands and knees, stretch your upper back similar to the way a cat would stretch. Add breathing exercises if you would like to.



- **LOWER BACK:** Lying on your back, tilt your pelvis to the ground by flattening out the natural curve in the low back area.



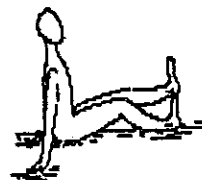
- **SHOULDER ROLLS - REVERSE:** Rolling the shoulders backwards will help to counteract the effects of flexing forward all day. This stretch is a must for students!



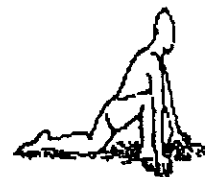
- **TRICEP AND SHOULDER STRETCH:** Sit up tall in a seated or standing position and place one hand on the upper back, emphasizing pointing the elbow up.



- **CALF STRETCH:** The top leg in this picture is the leg being stretched. Sit up tall (chin up) with good posture. Stretch the calf with the knee straight (not locked) and again with the knee bent to stretch both calf muscles.



- **SHIN AND HIP FLEXOR STRETCH:** Relax the back knee on the ground with the toe under. Make sure the front heel is on the ground and keep the chin up for good posture.



- **QUADRICEP STRETCH:** Lie face down with the hip bones touching the ground and bend one knee to your seat. Add your arm to the foot only if you can maintain the hip on the ground. The same stretch standing is also effective.



- **HAMSTRING STRETCH:** While lying on your back, relax your hip on the ground. Keep your toe relaxed and add the arms below the knee if needed.



- **GLUT STRETCHES:** Lying on your back, relax the hip on the ground and pull the knee towards the chest. Keep the foot relaxed. This is also a lower back stretch.

