

Stretches

It can be helpful to include stretches as part of your daily life for the following reasons:

- To improve physical and mental **relaxation**.
- To improve **body awareness** - focus on parts of the body other than those in pain.
- To help **coordination** by allowing freer and easier movement.
- To stretch scar tissue/under-used soft tissue (see Deconditioning) to increase range of movement i.e. increases **flexibility**
- To improve **circulation** - locally and generally throughout the body.
- Stretching after exercise may help to **reduce muscle soreness**.

How to stretch

Method

Be in a warm comfortable room. Wear loose, non restrictive clothing. Perhaps have music you enjoy in the background. Smile!

Warm-up/cool-down exercises

Before starting any stretches, you should ensure that your muscles are warmed up by doing 5 - 10 minutes of gentle exercises. This raises the body temperature and makes the tissues more "pliable". These exercises may include:

- Sitting down or standing up: ankle circling for each foot in turn, in both directions.
- Standing up: circling the shoulders forwards and then backwards.
- Standing up: turning the head to the right and then to the left.
- Standing up, with the feet apart: gently swing your arms and twist your trunk from side to side.
- Heel raises or marching on the spot.
- Shake the arms out and shake your legs out.

Breathing: This should be as relaxed and as near normal as possible - at all times.

DO NOT HOLD YOUR BREATH

Stretch - Take a gentle breath in, then as you breathe out, slowly move into stretch position - as instructed in the specific stretch.

Hold the position at the point where you feel mild tension. Try and relax a little more each time you breathe out. Hold for a count of 10-15. With practice, you will be able to increase this time - and even stop counting.

If you feel you have one side of your body that is more painful or stiff than the other, start with the side that is more limited first. On both sides only go to the range of stretch that is comfortable on your painful side.

DON'T BOUNCE!

Some things to think about

'Noticing' the stretch Whilst you are doing the movement, you may get a sense of fear about you pain or perhaps worry that you are doing harm. It may simply be that you do not enjoy the sensations that you have during the stretch. Just try to 'notice' these thoughts and sensations whilst you stay in the stretch. These thoughts and sensations are perfectly normal and don't have to interfere with you doing the stretch and gaining the benefits

Problems? If the feeling of tension in the muscle does not subside as you hold the stretch, you have taken it too far. So, ease back until it becomes more comfortable - remember to keep breathing! This is a gentle stretch and cannot damage your muscles - even with a chronic pain problem. Stretching into discomfort or pain or moving too fast defeats the aim of the stretch.

GOLDEN RULES

- ☺ **slow**
- ☺ **hold**
- ☺ **comfortable – keep smiling!**
- ☺ **relaxed breathing**
- ☺ **don't bounce**

These are a few suggested stretches to do after your exercise. You may want to add in or substitute other stretches you are taught during your treatment. *If a stretch feels particularly tight – this is one that you need to work on!*

Remember – you can also do stretches at all sorts of time throughout the day – whilst talking on the telephone, in the bath, watching TV, etc.

NB If doing stretches to both sides, start with the more uncomfortable side first, and then **move the same distance with the other side.**



Inner arm stretch

- Feet shoulder width apart, arms relaxed by the side, shoulders relaxed and sit or stand up tall.
- Raise your arms up to where you feel comfortable, palms facing the ceiling, push fingers down towards the floor.
- Relax and breath, gently lift your fingers back up, turn hands over and lowers arms to the side.



Tricep stretch

- Feet shoulder width apart, raise one arm above head and bend elbow as if stretching your back. If you feel comfortable use other arm to gentle increase the stretch further.
- Relax and breath, gently release the stretch and relax the arms back to the side.



Calf stretch

- Stand at arms length from the wall, place hand softly on the wall for balance only, place one leg a strides distance back, front leg remains softly bent for balance only. Feet remain facing forward with heels on the floor. Gently push back heel into the floor whilst remaining up tall and relaxed.
- Gently come back into standing and repeat on opposite leg



Hamstring stretch

- Sit towards the front edge of the chair, one leg straight and one leg bent. Feet remain relaxed. Both hands on the bent leg, for balance only.
- Keeping back straight and tall, 'hinge' forward from the hips, gently feeling the stretch behind the leg.
- Gently come out of the stretch and repeat on the othe leg.



Abdominal stretch

- Laying face down, palms facing down, allow feet to relax.
- Push down through hands until arms are extended or till feel comfortable, lifting head and torso off the ground.
- Breath throughout the stretch and gently return to starting point.



Lower back stretch

- Lying on back, keeping head and upper body relaxed and on the floor, gently raise knees off the floor.
- Either using your arm or a towel, gently start to pull knees into towards chest.
- Breath throughout the stretch and gently return to starting point.



Trunk twist

- Laying on back, relax upper body and position arms where feel comfortable.
- Keeping upper body in contact with the floor, step one leg over the other and let leg drop with gravity. Return gently and swap to other side.

If this stretch is too hard, bend both knees and drop both at the same time. You can use a pillow as shown to support leg leg dropped over.



Inner thigh stretch

- Lying on back, keeping feet together, bend legs so heels come towards bottom.
- Keeping feet together, let knees drop down sideways with gravity without forcing.



Whole body stretch

- Lying comfortably on back, float arms over head with legs out straight.
- As you exhale, point fingers and toes feeling a stretch throughout the whole body.
- Relax and stretch again.