

STRETCH For a Healthy Back

Benefits of stretching

- Addresses muscle imbalances
- Improves flexibility
- Reduces risk of injury
- Improves performance

How to stretch

- Try to stretch when warm if you can. You will get a better result if you have done a little exercise.
- Stretch slowly, until you feel a pull in the muscle. Don't bounce.
- Hold for at least 20 seconds and release gently.
- You should not feel any pain.
- If you experience pain with stretching or are in any doubt seek advice from a Chartered Physiotherapist.

1 Buttock (Gluteal) Stretch

Lying on your back with your knees bent, cross ankle of the leg to be stretched over the other knee. Put your arms around the thigh as shown. Bring your thigh towards your stomach. Feel the stretch in your buttock.



2 Buttock (Piriformis) Stretch

In lying, cross the leg that you want to stretch over the other one. Gently pull your knee towards your body, towards the other shoulder. You should feel a stretch in the buttock.



3 Floor Reach (Back) Stretch

Sit on your heels and reach forwards with your arms, palms facing the floor. Slide your arms away as far as you can comfortably until you feel a pull.

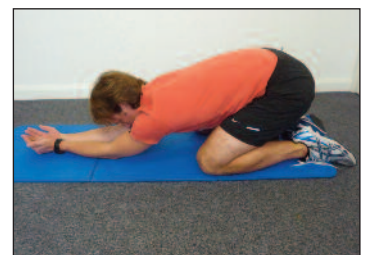


Modifications

a) Cross one arm over the other and rotate towards the stationary arm. You should feel a stretch on your trunk on the side of the arm you have crossed over.



b) Put your elbows and palms together facing the ceiling and slide your elbows away. You should feel the pull more along the sides of your back.



4 Hip Flexor Stretch

Kneel with one knee on the ground, and the other knee bent forward. Ensure that a cushion is under the back knee for comfort. Lean forward on to the front leg. Feel a stretch through the front thigh region on the kneeling leg.

Watchpoint

Protect your back by drawing up your tummy muscles and squeezing your buttocks. Don't allow your back to arch.



5 Hamstring Stretch

Lie flat on back; hug your knee to chest. Slowly straighten knee until you feel a pull on the back of your thigh.



6 Pelvic Tilts

Lie in your back. Tighten your stomach and buttock muscles and try to flatten your lower back into the floor. Hold for 5 seconds.



Modification

If you have a big curve in your lower back and cannot flatten it, you may find it easier to put your feet up on a chair as shown opposite.



7 Thread the Needle (mid back stretch)

Position as shown below on your hands and knees. Reach under your trunk with your arms until you feel a pull in your shoulder blade region on the same side. Hold for 5 seconds.



Article by Martine Cooper, Chartered Physiotherapist