

Stretches for Your Spine

In addition to spinal adjustments, flexibility and conditioning are essential for spinal health. Keeping the muscles and other tissues around your spine toned and flexible is very important. Technique is important: Stretch the tissues only to the point of mild tension, hold the stretch without bouncing for at least ten seconds, and then, let the muscle totally relax. Repeat 3-5 times. Do not forget to breathe. Resist the tendency to hold your breath. Should you experience pain or discomfort while doing an exercise or stretch, stop immediately.



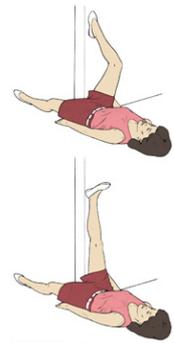
Hip Stretch

Lying on your back, gently pull your left leg, with the knee relaxed, toward your right shoulder. Let your arms do the majority of the work, pulling the thigh toward the opposite shoulder. Your leg should be totally relaxed. Repeat with the opposite leg.

Hamstring stretch

Tight hamstrings increase the pressure on your low back when you bend. So when these muscles are not stretched out to adequate lengths, your spine suffers. If you sit most of the day this stretch is particularly important, because the hamstring muscles become shorter when they are kept in the contracted, seated position for long periods.

There are numerous ways to stretch your hamstrings. Choose one that is the most comfortable for you. The stretch illustrated uses a door or wall for support.



Low back rotation

Lie on your back with your hips and knees bent. Your knees should be pointing straight up. Your feet should be flat on the floor with your heels up near your buttocks. Lay your arms out on both sides of your body, and gently allow your knees to drop toward the floor on the left side until you feel the stretch in your low back. Don't worry if your knees don't make it all the way to the floor before you feel the stretch. Only go to the point of mild tension, not beyond.

Eventually you may be able to go all the way, but don't push it. Hold the stretch for at least ten seconds. Then return your knees slowly to the starting position. Repeat the stretch to the right side.

Cat Stretch

Kneel on all fours, knees under hips and hands under shoulders. Contract the abdominal muscles to bring the head, neck and back in alignment. Inhale and tip the hip bones towards the ceiling while drawing the shoulders back and down away from your ears; look up. Exhale and tuck the chin while pulling your belly towards your spine. Round the back and feel a stretch down your spine. Repeat for 4 to 6 breaths, moving smoothly between each move.



Back Stretch



Kneel on the ground with your arms out in front of you. Slide your arms further away and slowly shift your hips back towards your feet until a comfortable stretch is felt. Gently walk your fingertips away from your body for a stronger stretch in the shoulders. Work on keeping your tailbone as close to your heels as possible. Now slide your hands to the right until a stretch is felt down the side of your torso. Repeat to the left.

Kneeling hip flexor stretch

The hip flexors are the muscles that work together to lift your thighs as you walk. To stretch the hip flexors, kneel down on your left knee. Holding the support put your right leg out in front of you so that your right knee is almost straight and your toes are pointed straight ahead. Keeping your upper body upright, gently allow your body weight to shift forward bending your right knee, until you feel a mild stretch on the front part of your left hip. Hold for 10 secs. Relax and repeat the stretch with the opposite leg and hip. (You can use a pillow under your knee, and a chair next to you for balance).



Shoulder & Chest Stretch

This can be performed kneeling or standing. Clasp hands behind back and straighten arms. Raise hands as high as possible and bend forward from the waist and hold.



Neck side flexion. Lower your ear towards your shoulder while keeping your face looking forwards; feel the stretch along the opposite side of your neck; return to upright. Repeat on the other side. In addition, you can also stretch the opposite hand towards the floor as this deepens the stretch on the neck muscles. Be careful to stay looking straight ahead.

