

A good stretching program is important. ***Please remember to consult your physician or other health care professional before starting this or any other fitness program to determine if it is right for you.*** Here are 15 stretches that you can follow:

1. Start with a short 5 minutes brisk walk, marching in place, dancing, arm swings and arm circles.
2. Child's pose - Kneel with toes touching and knees spread apart. Slowly bend over and touch the forehead to the floor or mat. Arms can be at the sides, along the legs, palms facing up; or extended in front of the head with palms on the floor. Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply in this pose; hold child's pose for 3 to 5 breaths.
3. Cat/cow stretches - Start on all fours with the spine and neck in a neutral position. The back should be flat like a tabletop. Eyes should look straight down to the ground. As you inhale, drop the belly down and slowly lift the neck and head up. This is the cow half of the pose— picture a cow's swayed back with bony hips. Next, on an exhale, lift the belly and spine so the back is arched like a cat's. Eyes should look toward the belly button. Alternate cat-cow stretches for 5 to 10 breaths. After the last cat pose, return to the neutral hands-and-knees position.
4. Overhead arm stretch - Stand up straight with feet together. With back straight, reach arms straight up and overhead, without locking elbows. Hands can be touching, or apart. You can also do a very gentle back bend here. If you choose to bend backwards, keep your chin and neck lifted.
5. Outstretched arms - Stand with arms outstretched (think wide, wider, widest!) and thumbs pointing down. Gently push arms back as if you are squeezing a ball between your shoulder blades. Alternatively, you can slowly rotate the arms so that thumbs are pointing up. Hold; then rotate back to the first position. Hold again, gently squeezing arms back. Repeat a few times, always moving slowly.
6. Shoulder stretch - Reach the right arm straight out in front of you. Bend the left arm and put the left wrist on the back of the right arm, just above the elbow. Your left palm will be facing to the side. Use the left arm to gently press the right arm across your body until you feel a good stretch. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Switch arms and repeat.
7. Tricep stretch - Raise the right arm straight up overhead, palm facing in towards your head. Then bend the elbow so your fingers touch, or reach toward, the middle of your upper back. Grab the right elbow with the left hand and gently pull back until you feel the stretch in the right tricep. Hold the stretch for 10 to 30 seconds. Then switch arms and repeat.
8. Knee lunge - Start by kneeling on a mat or soft surface. Keeping your back straight, place your left foot on the ground and gently press forward until knee is bent at a 90-degree angle (the knee is directly over the ankle). This stretches the left hip and groin. Place hands or elbows on left knee to stabilize and hold for 10 to 30 seconds, without bouncing. Switch legs and repeat on the other side.
9. Butterfly stretch - In a seated position, place the soles of the feet together and hold them with the hands. The legs are now forming the butterfly "wings." Elbows can be between the legs or resting on the knees. Gently press the knees down to increase the stretch.
10. Straddle stretch - To do a straddle stretch, sit on the ground or a mat with legs apart in a straddle position. Once you are seated, bend slowly over the right leg, then to the center, then over the left leg. Hold each position for at least 10 to 30 seconds, without bouncing.
11. Quadricep stretch - Stand facing the back of a chair (a wall or a tree also works; you just need a place to hold on to help you balance). Using the left arm on the chair for balance, bend the right leg and grab it with the right hand. Gently press the foot toward the buttocks until you feel the stretch in the front of the thigh. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds, and then switch legs.

12. Calf stretch - To do a calf stretch, start by placing your forearms on a wall or tree. Stand with one leg near the wall or tree. Extend the other leg back, keeping the heel on the ground, until you feel the stretch in the calf muscle (back of lower leg). Hold for 10 to 30 seconds without bouncing. Switch sides and repeat on other leg.

13. Side Lunge - Stand up straight with legs apart, wider than hip distance. Bend one leg to a 90-degree angle (straight line from knee to ankle) and keep the other leg stretched out straight, with toes and heels on the floor pointing out at about a 45-degree angle. Feel the stretch in the inner thigh and hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Keep back straight. Switch sides and repeat.

14. Crossover toe touch - Stand with arms hanging loosely at sides and feet together, with knees very slightly bent. Slowly roll down from the back and reach toward the toes with your hands. Hold the stretch without bouncing.

15. Hamstring stretch - To perform a hamstring stretch, start in a seated position with the left leg extended straight forward, toes pointing up. Bend your right leg and place the sole of your right foot along the knee or inner thigh of the left leg. Reach forward toward the toes of the left foot until you feel the hamstring stretch (your hamstring muscle is on the back of your thigh). Hold for 10 to 30 seconds without bouncing. Switch legs and repeat.