

# The Mind/Body Connection: Basic Standing and Seated Stretching Exercises

## Are You Ready To Be Active?

If you have been inactive recently and want to begin a regular exercise routine or if you want to begin a new type of exercise routine, you must consider safety first.

Everyone beginning a new or very different exercise routine should use the brief Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR Q) to help them find out how to start safely.

## Stretching Safety Reminders

You should be under the care of a health-care provider if you are pregnant, have chronic disease conditions/symptoms, or have a disability. If you have health concerns you should consult your healthcare provider about safe types and amounts of activity for you.

If you will only be doing stretching exercise, it is important to warm up your body first. Stretching muscles before they are “warmed up” can result in injury. Warm up by stationary or regular walking for at least 5 minutes before you start stretching.

Move into stretches slowly and mindfully, without bouncing. Elbows and knees should always be slightly bent, when you are stretching. Only stretch as far as you are comfortable. Hold the stretch while breathing, then return to your original position.

Stretching may feel slightly uncomfortable, but **you should not feel pain**. If you do feel pain, slowly reduce the stretch until the pain stops. If you cannot do a stretch without pain, you should practice an alternative stretch.

Always BREATHE while in the stretch, do not hold your breath during stretching.

It is important to have good posture when you are doing any exercise, whether seated or standing.

This publication is part of a four-part series on **The Mind/Body Connection**. This publication is part of a four-part series on **The Mind/Body Connection**. Other publications in this series are:

HSW-AP.003 The Mind/Body Connection: Introduction and Safe Exercise Practice for Adults

HSW-AP.004 The Mind/Body Connection: Deep Breathing and Simple Meditation

HSW-AP.006 The Mind/Body Connection: Beginner Level Balance and Standing Stretches

## Standing Posture

This should be a natural stance and not too stiff. Try to stay relaxed while holding your body in good posture.

- Shoulders are back and chest is open.
- Head is upright and straight.
- Stomach is pulled in.
- Legs fall straight down from the hips.
- Feet are parallel with toes facing forward.



Standing Posture

## Sitting Posture

- Body weight is evenly distributed on the seat of the chair.
- Shoulders are back and chest is open.
- Head is straight.
- Knees are bent at a right angle, at the same level or a little higher than your hips.
- Feet are flat on the ground.
- A rolled up towel is placed at your lower back to provide lumbar support and keep the curve of the spine if needed.



Sitting posture

## Warm-up Exercises

*Do warm-up exercises for at least five minutes prior to stretching.*

### Deep Breathing

Use this type of breathing to prepare your mind and body for additional activity.

If during deep breathing you feel light headed, return to your normal breathing pattern.

1. Place your hands on your stomach in the rest position and breathe out as much air as you can.
2. Take a deep breath in slowly through the nose.
3. Feel your hands move out as you fill your lungs completely with air.
4. Control your breath out. Tighten your abdominal muscles in and up; as you breathe out, your hands will return to the rest position.
5. Do 3 to 5 breaths at first. Increase to 8 to 12 breaths, as you become more comfortable.

### Walking In Place

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Start slowly stepping in place while moving your arms, for a minute.
3. When you are comfortable, raise your knees higher with each step.
4. If able, begin to step and move arms more quickly, to increase your warm-up.
5. Slow down your steps for the last minute of your warm-up session.

## Upper Body Seated Stretching Exercises

### Cable Stretch

1. Sit in correct posture with shoulders relaxed and hands in lap.
2. Tuck your chin down as you straighten your upper back and neck, lifting your head up like a cable is pulling your head and torso straight upward.
3. Hold for 3 seconds and relax.
4. Repeat 3 times.

### Diagonal Neck Stretch

1. Sit in correct posture.
2. Turn head slightly to one side.
3. Look down toward the arm pit.
4. Breathe normally and hold for 10 to 15 seconds.
5. Return the head to the original position.
6. Repeat on the opposite side; this is 1 set.
7. Repeat for 3 to 5 sets.



Diagonal Neck Stretch

### Shoulder Shrug

1. Sit in correct posture.
2. While inhaling, slowly bring shoulders up to the ears.
3. Hold for approximately 3 seconds.
4. Exhale and rotate shoulders back and down.
5. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

### Executive Stretch

1. Sit in correct posture.
2. Lock hands behind your head.
3. Bring your elbows back as far as possible.
4. Inhale deeply while leaning back and stretching.
5. Hold the position for 10 to 20 seconds, while you breathe normally.
6. Relax back to correct seated posture.
7. Repeat 1 time.



Executive Stretch

### Hand Massage

A good time to try the hand massage is after you have washed your hands while applying lotion.

1. Very gently, massage the inside and outside of one hand, using pressure from the thumb and fingers of your other hand.
2. Do this before beginning key board work and repeat often.

### Finger Massage

A good time to try the finger massage is after you have washed your hands while applying lotion.

1. Very gently, massage fingers of each hand individually and slowly.
2. Start at the base of each finger and move toward the nail.
3. Massage spaces between fingers with gentle pressure; do this daily.

## Wrist Stretch

1. Hold your arms straight out in front of you with relaxed elbows, palms of your hands facing down.
2. Spread your fingers then slowly lift your fingertips towards the ceiling.
3. Breathe normally and hold for 10 to 20 seconds.
4. Keeping your fingers spread, gently lower your fingertips to reach for the floor.
5. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds; remember to breathe.
6. Repeat 3 times.



Wrist Stretch

## Upper Body Standing Stretching Exercises

### Upper Back/Shoulder Stretch

1. Stand in correct posture with your knees slightly bent.
2. Hold arms in front of you at shoulder height with palms facing outward.
3. Relax your shoulders and keep your upper body still as you reach forward with your hands.
4. Stop when you feel a stretch.
5. If you are comfortable and want a deeper stretch, you may cross your arms at the wrist, bring your palms together and interlace your fingers.
6. While breathing normally, hold position for 10 to 30 seconds.
7. Unlace fingers and return hands to your sides. Repeat this stretch 3 to 5 times.



Upper Back Shoulder Stretch

### Upper Back Stretch

1. Stand in correct posture with knees slightly bent.
2. Hold your arms out in front of you at shoulder height with palms facing each other.
3. Interlace your fingers and turn your palms so that they face away from your body.
4. With soft elbows, gently push the palms outward.
5. Keep your back straight and the tummy tight.
6. While breathing normally, hold for 20 seconds.



Upper Back Stretch

### Shoulder Stretch

1. Stand in correct posture with knees slightly bent.
2. While breathing normally, take the right arm across the body at shoulder height, with the shoulder relaxed.
3. Place the left hand or forearm on the right arm just above the elbow, with head facing forward.
4. Use the left hand or arm to gently bring the right arm towards the chest.



Shoulder Stretch

5. Hold for 20 seconds, release arms back to sides.
6. Repeat as above, with the left arm coming across the body.

## Lower Body Seated Stretching Exercises

### Foot Rotation

1. Sit in correct posture.
2. Slowly rotate each foot at the ankle.
3. While breathing normally, rotate the ankle 3 times in one direction.
4. Then rotate 3 times in the opposite direction.
5. Repeat 1 time on each side.



Foot Rotation

### Point and Flex Ankle Stretch

1. Sit securely toward the front of a sturdy armless chair.
2. Stretch your right leg out in front of you.
3. With your heel on the floor, bring your toes up off of the floor and toward you.
4. While breathing normally, hold the position for 10 seconds.
5. Point toes away from you towards the floor.
6. While breathing normally, hold for 10 seconds.
7. Repeat with left leg as above; this is one set.
8. Repeat for 3 to 5 sets.



Point and Flex Ankle Stretch

### Seated Forward Bend

If you have had hip/back surgery do not practice this exercise without first clearing with your health care provider.

1. To start, sit up toward the front of a sturdy chair in correct posture.
2. Keep your feet flat on the floor, shoulder width apart.
3. Slowly bend forward from your hips; keep your back and neck straight.
4. Relax your neck slightly and lower your chin.
5. Slowly bend farther forward and slide your hands down your legs toward your shins, stop when you feel a stretch or slight discomfort.
6. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds.
7. Keeping your chin tucked, straighten up slowly all the way to the starting position; untuck chin last.
8. Repeat 3 times.



Seated Forward Bend

### Seated Twist

If you have had hip/back surgery, do not practice this exercise without first clearing with your health care provider.

1. To start, sit up toward the front of a sturdy chair in correct posture.
2. Keep your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.
3. Slowly twist upper body and head to the left, without moving your hips.

4. Twist only as far as is comfortable for you.
5. Hold onto the lower left side of the back of the chair with your left hand.
6. Place your right hand on the outside of your left thigh.
7. If comfortable, you may twist farther and try to look over the left shoulder.
8. While breathing normally, hold the position for 10 to 30 seconds.
9. Slowly return to face forward position on an exhale.
10. Repeat as above on the right side; this is 1 set.
11. Repeat for 3 sets.



Seated Twist

## Lower Body Standing Stretching Exercises

### Calf Stretch

Stretches the back of the lower leg.

1. Stand in correct posture with knees slightly bent.
2. Step back with the left foot keeping left heel on the floor, toes facing forward.
3. Bend the front (right) knee, keeping the knee behind or above the ankle; the knee should not go past the ankle.
4. Place both hands on right thigh. **Modification:** This can be done standing behind a sturdy chair; at this point you place your hands on the back of the chair, instead of on the right thigh. In a straight line from head to the left heel, lean forward, keeping the left heel on the floor.
5. While breathing normally, hold the stretch 10 seconds; you can increase to 30 seconds as you get stronger.
6. Return to stand in correct posture then repeat on other side as above, stepping back with the right foot.



Calf Stretch

### Hamstring Stretch

Stretches the back of the thigh.

1. Stand in correct posture with your right foot slightly behind hips.
2. Make sure your feet are correctly positioned for balance before stretching.
3. Slowly bend the rear leg, as if sitting backwards.
4. Keep the front leg straight with a very slight bend at the knee.
5. Place hands on right thigh. Never place your hands on the front leg.
6. Slowly push buttocks backwards, until you feel a slight tension in your hamstring.
7. Keep your neck in line with your spine.
8. While breathing normally, hold the stretch on each side for 20 seconds; gradually build to 30 seconds.



Hamstring Stretch

## Lower Back Stretch

1. Stand in correct posture with knees bent.
2. Place your hands on your thighs.
3. Slowly pull stomach in and arch your back upwards (like a cat).
4. Look forward with your face, keeping chin up and eyes focused in front of you.
5. Support your weight by placing your hands on your thighs; slightly push against thighs with hands.
6. While breathing normally, hold for 20 seconds.
7. Slowly uncurl to original position.



Lower Back Stretch

## Additional Resources:

Exercise and Physical Activity: Your Everyday Guide from the National Institute on Aging:

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide/>

Healthy Back Habits – Position and Posture: <http://www.ca.uky.edu/HES/FCS/FACTSHTS/HEEL-LR-921.pdf>

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June 2011

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