

The Mind/Body Connection: Beginner Level Balance And Standing Stretches

The American College of Sports Medicine suggests that adults should include flexibility exercises into their regular exercise. Stretching may help develop and maintain range of motion in the body's joints. ACSM also suggests that adults should stretch 2 to 3 days a week.

Stretching Exercise Safety

It is best to do stretching exercises after you do strength or cardio (endurance) exercises like walking or resistance band training. If stretching is the only type of exercise you do, always warm up first by doing some deep breathing, and walking in place with arm motion and/or arm circles for about five minutes.

Stretching Safely: Tips from the National Institute on Aging

- Stretching should not be painful. If while moving into a stretch you feel pain you are stretching too far. Ease up from the stretch so that it no longer hurts.
- Mild discomfort or a mild pulling feeling is normal.
- Slowly move into position and hold the stretch for 10 to 30 seconds. Relax, then repeat, trying to stretch farther.
- Slowly stretch into the desired position, as far as possible without pain, and hold the stretch while you breathe. Relax, and then repeat.
- Remember to BREATHE; do not hold your breath in a stretch.
- If you have had a hip replacement, check with your doctors before doing any lower body exercises, including stretches.

Standing in correct posture

- Shoulders are back and chest is forward.
- Head is upright and straight.
- Stomach is pulled in.
- Feet are hip width apart (legs fall straight down from the hip).

This stance should be natural and not stiff. Try to stay relaxed while holding your body in good posture. Practicing good posture mindfully throughout the day when seated or standing is an easy way to begin to strengthen the muscles in your neck, stomach and torso (core muscles).

This publication is part of a 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.005 The Mind/Body Connection: Basic Standing and Seated Stretching Exercises



Standing Posture

Exercises to Improve and Maintain Balance

Toe Stands

This exercise can improve balance and leg strength.

1. Stand in correct posture behind your chair.
2. Use the chair for support if needed.
3. Place your feet about shoulder width apart and lift up your heels, rising up on your toes.
4. Pause, then return your heels to the floor.
5. Breathe evenly during the exercise.
6. Repeat 5 to 10 times, add a set or practice on one foot, as you progress



Toe Stands

Alternating Steps

This exercise improves balance and physical endurance. You may increase how long you step as you become comfortable with the exercise.

1. Stand in correct posture behind your chair.
2. Use chair for support if needed.
3. Start marching in place, alternating steps at a slow to moderate pace.
4. Breathe evenly during the exercise.
5. Continue stepping for 15 to 30 seconds.

Heel to Toe Walk

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Raise your arms out to the sides at shoulder height.
3. Position the heel of one foot just in front of the toes of the other foot. Your heel and toes should touch or almost touch.
4. Choose a stationary focal point at eye level to focus on as you walk steadily toward the point.
5. Continue to walk putting your heel just in front of the toes of the other foot.
6. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise. Repeat for 20 steps.



Heel to Toe Walk

Balance Walk

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Raise arms out to the sides at shoulder height.
3. Choose a stationary focal point at eye level in front of you. Focus on that point as you walk toward the object.
4. Walk in a straight line with one foot in front of the other.
5. As you walk, if you can, lift your back leg by bending your knee up and pause for 1 second before placing that foot in front of the other foot and stepping forward.
6. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
7. Repeat for 20 steps, alternating legs.



Balance Walk

Side Stepping

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Raise your left foot and place it to the left. Raise your right foot and place it where your left foot had been.

3. Raise your right foot and place it back at its original spot. Raise your left foot and place in the starting location. (Left together, right together, left together, right together...)
4. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise. You can add a set as you progress.

The Box Step

This exercise improves balance, coordination, and physical endurance.

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Step your right foot forward, then bring your left foot to your right foot (feet together).
3. Step your left foot to the left, then feet together.
4. Step your left foot back, then feet together.
5. Step your right foot to the right, then feet together.
6. Breathe fully and deeply during exercise.
7. Repeat cycle 3 to 5 times. Increase repetitions as you become stronger.

Standing stretching exercises to improve and maintain flexibility

Shoulder Rolls

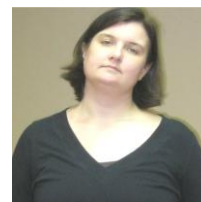
Improves the range of motion of the shoulders and upper back. This is a great tool to ease muscle tension in the shoulder area.

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Slowly roll your shoulders forward making small circles for a count of 5.
3. Slowly roll your shoulders backward making small circles for a count of 5.
4. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.

Ear to Shoulder

Improve range of motion in the neck and is good for tension release.

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Bring left ear to left shoulder without lifting the shoulder up.
3. Hold for 10 seconds.
4. Repeat to the right side.
5. Breathe fully and deeply during this exercise.
6. Repeat cycle 3 times.

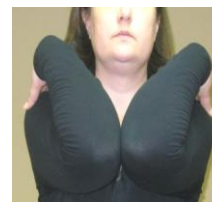


Ear to Shoulder

Touch Elbows Stretch

This exercise helps with chest/back flexibility and torso range of motion.

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Bring your arms up and out to the sides parallel with the floor.
3. Bend your elbows and touch your fingertips to your shoulders.
4. Raise elbows to shoulder level.
5. Gently move your elbows together toward your body's midline.
6. Try to get elbows as close to each other as possible while still remaining comfortable.
7. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
8. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds.
9. Release by opening elbows back out to your side, unbend arms and lower arms to your sides.



Touch Elbows Stretch

Triceps Stretch

Stretches muscles behind upper arm.

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Hold one end of a towel in right hand.
3. Raise and bend right arm to drape towel down back. Keep your right arm in this position and continue holding onto the towel.
4. Reach behind your lower back and grasp bottom end of towel with left hand.
5. Climb left hand progressively higher up towel, which also pulls your right arm down.
6. Continue until your hands touch, or as close to that as you can comfortably go.
7. Reverse positions.
8. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
9. Repeat each position 3 to 5 times.



Triceps Stretch

Wrist Stretch

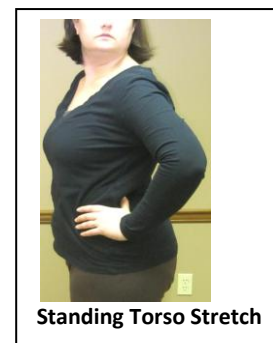
1. Hold your arms straight out in front of you with relaxed elbows, palms facing down.
2. Spread your fingers then slowly lift your fingertips toward the ceiling.
3. Breathe normally and hold for 10 to 20 seconds.
4. Keeping your fingers spread, gently lower your fingertips to reach for the floor.
5.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



Wrist Stretch

Standing Torso Stretch

1. Stand in correct posture.
2. Place your hands on your hips.
3. Inhale and stand up tall.
4. Exhale and keeping your hips facing forward twist your torso to the right.
5. While in the twist, turn your head to look over the right shoulder.
6. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Return to the original position.
7. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
8. Repeat, twisting torso to the left and looking over the left shoulder.



Standing Torso Stretch

Hamstring Stretch

Stretches muscles in the back of the thigh.

1. Stand in correct posture, behind a chair, holding the back of it with both hands.
2. Bend forward from the hips (not waist), keeping back and shoulders straight at all times.
3. When upper body is parallel to floor, hold position for 10 to 30 seconds. You should feel a stretch in the backs of your thighs.
4. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
5. Repeat 3 to 5 times.



Hamstring Stretch

Calves

Stretches lower leg muscles with knee straight and knee bent.

1. Stand facing a wall with hands flat against wall, arms outstretched and elbows straight.
2. Keeping your left knee slightly bent, toes of right foot slightly turned inward, step back 1 to 2 feet with right leg, heel and foot flat on floor. You should feel a stretch in your calf muscle, but you should not feel pain. If you do not feel a stretch, move your foot farther back until you do.
3. Hold position for 10 to 30 seconds.
4. Bend knee of right leg, keep heel and foot flat on floor.
5. Hold position for another 10 to 30 seconds.
6. Repeat with left leg.
7. Breathe fully and deeply during the exercise.
8. Repeat 3 to 5 times for each leg.



Calves

Additional Resource:

HEEL – Physical Activity, Exercise and Fall Prevention:
<http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/fcs7/fcs7189/fcs7189.pdf>

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