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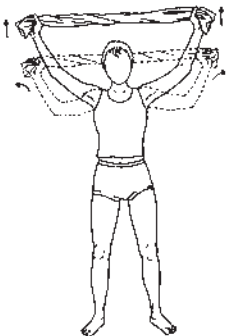
**Self Care**  
™ Health Advice for Life

# Exercises for Flexibility

**Regular stretching can help keep your body mobile and flexible and help avoid neck aches, back aches and injuries. Stretching exercises are best done when muscles have been warmed up with aerobic exercise.**

Try the following stretches. Stretch slowly and gently and hold each stretch for 10-15 seconds. Avoid "locking" your joints into place when you straighten them during stretches. Stretching exercises may feel slightly uncomfortable, but should not cause pain.

## 1. Standing neck and shoulder stretch

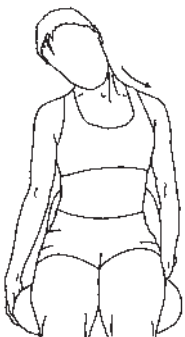


Hold the ends of a rolled up towel with each hand. Take a breath in and, while breathing out, raise the towel above your head. With arms raised, keep a gentle outward pull on the towel to work the shoulder muscles.

### Advanced exercise

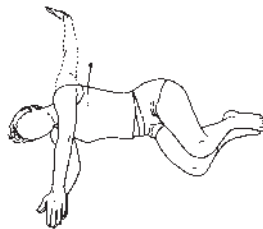
Pull the towel behind the shoulders. Stretch for 10-15 seconds each time and repeat 2-3 times with no 'jerking' movement.

## 2. Sitting neck stretch



While sitting in a chair, place your left hand under your buttocks, palm facing upwards. Tuck your chin in to your chest (to create a 'double chin') and gently bend your head away from the hand you are sitting on. Hold for 10-15 seconds. Repeat each side.

## 3. Mid back stretch



Lying on your right side, rest a towel under your head. Now stretch your left arm upwards and behind you. Repeat 2-3 times each side.

## 4. Gentle hip stretch

Lying on your back, hug one knee to your chest. Keep your head resting on the ground.



Stretch for 10-15 seconds each time and repeat 2-3 times for each leg.

### Advanced exercise

Progress to raising your head and bringing your forehead to your knee. Also, progress to turning your foot inward to stretch lower back and buttock muscles.

## 5. Hamstring stretch

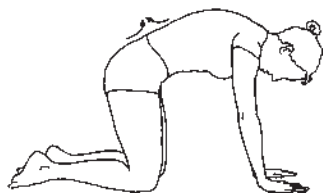
Lying on your back, lift one leg and place hands around the back of the thigh. Try to straighten the leg gently.

Do not strain. Repeat 2-3 times for each leg.

Alternatively, stand and place bent leg on chair or bench and gently try to straighten leg for 10-15 seconds and repeat 2-3 times for each leg.



## 6. Back stretch flexing ('cat stretch')



On hands and knees, gently curve your back upwards. Do not hold the position but go on to exercise seven.

## 7. Lower back release

Now gently stretch your arms out in front of your body and place the buttocks between the heels.



## 8. Lying leg crossover stretch

If your work involves bending forward for extended periods of time, take regular breaks and try the following stretch.

Similar to exercise No.4, lie on your back with legs extended. Raise one leg and bend at knee to 90 degrees in knee and hip. Cross that leg over extended leg, while opposite shoulder stays on ground. Go until you feel a slight pull in the buttock and lower back. Hold for 10-15 seconds and repeat. Switch legs and do opposite side. Keep your head resting on the ground. Repeat 2-3 times for each leg.

Points to remember when exercising:

- Check with a doctor before starting an exercise program
- A physiotherapist can test flexibility and advise on exercise programs for specific needs
- Strong abdominal muscles can help posture and help support your back. A physiotherapist can advise on abdominal exercises suitable for your flexibility and fitness level
- Warm up muscles before stretching (e.g., five minutes of walking)
- Always combine stretching with regular aerobic exercise such as swimming, walking or cycling to maintain a healthy heart and lungs (called cardiovascular fitness)
- Do all neck and back stretches slowly and gently
- Take regular breaks every 30 minutes if you have a desk job – do some of the recommended neck and shoulder stretches
- If you spend extended periods of time leaning forward, stretch your back regularly.

### Related fact cards

- *Back Pain*
- *Exercise and the Heart*
- *Pelvic Floor Exercises*
- *Sprains and Strains*

### For more information

**Bodyworks** (ABC Publishers 1999) by Francine St. George.

**A physiotherapist** – listed in the yellow pages of the phone book or contact a public hospital, community health centre or the Australian Physiotherapy Association at website [www.physiotherapy.asn.au](http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au)

**HEALTH/insite** – website [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

**Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

**NPS Medicines Line** – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

**The Poisons Information Centre** – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist