

# Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

## Flexibility Exercises

Most Americans understand that cardio exercises such as running, swimming or biking and weight lifting exercises such as the shoulder press, bicep curl and squat are essential components of a healthy lifestyle. Flexibility training and stretching, however, are often neglected. Flexibility is essential to protecting your body from injury, especially if you spend most of the day sitting in front of a computer.

Flexibility not only reduces stiffness in the body, but it also helps your body to pump blood to your muscles and nerves, helps alleviate the possibility of aggravating or reinjuring yourself if you have any musculoskeletal problems and helps maintain good range of motion of your joints.

Poor flexibility has been linked to general stiffness in the body and low-back pain in particular.

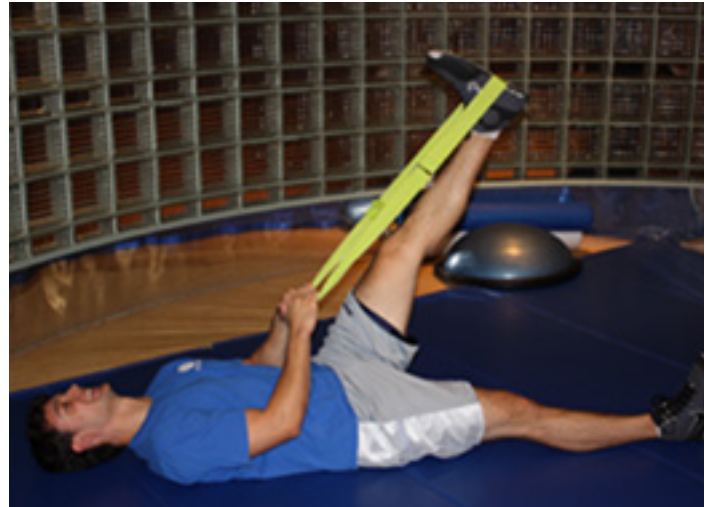
### Dynamic Warm-Up

It's important to warm up before attempting a walk, run or exercise program. To avoid injury caused by exerting cold muscles, try the following dynamic warm-up to increase your core temperature, muscle flexibility and heart rate.

- Toe-touch.** Standing straight up, hold your arms out directly in front of you and walk forward, kicking your legs up and trying to touch your toes to your hands without lowering your arms. Repeat 10-20 times for each leg. It's OK if you can't reach your hands when you first start out—just kick your leg up as high as it will go.

- Inverted toe-touch.** Standing straight up, lean forward and reach your arms down to the ground while you lift your right leg behind you. Keep your back straight and return to start. Repeat 10-20 times on each leg. Again, if you can't reach all the way down to the ground, simply go as far as you can without losing your balance.

- Knee hug.** Standing up straight, bring your right knee to your chest and squeeze with your arms. Get



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your knee as close to your chest as possible without losing your balance and hold for about 5 seconds. Repeat 10-20 times with each leg.

- Lunge.** Step forward with your left leg, bending your right knee until it touches the ground. Be sure that your left knee stays in line with your ankle. Repeat 10-20 times on each leg.

- Groiner.** Start off with a lunge with your left leg forward. Bring your left elbow down to meet your knee and then your ankle, sliding along the inside of your leg. Repeat 10-20 times on each leg. If you can't get your elbow to touch your ankle just yet, that's OK. You can start with simply bringing your elbow down to your knee and gradually progress to your ankle as you continue to incorporate these stretches into your everyday routine.

For a video example of these dynamic warm-up exercises, visit the Health and Wellness Tips page found at [www.acatoday.org/patients](http://www.acatoday.org/patients).

### Stretches for Your Back

If you're experiencing back pain or if you have a back injury, try these stretches to help facilitate movement in the affected muscle or joint. Stretches should be held for 15 to 30 seconds.

•Hamstring stretch. Lie on your back with one leg straight out and one leg bent at the knee. Lift your straight leg up in the air. If you want, you can loop a towel or exercise band around your foot and gently pull the band toward your chest. Repeat three times on each leg.

•Piriformis stretch. This can be completed either lying down or standing straight up. With one leg straight, pull the other knee into the chest toward the opposite shoulder. Repeat three times on each leg.

•Cobra. Lying on your stomach, gently push your upper body off of the floor, hold and then return to start. Repeat this stretch three times.

To see a video of these, and other back stretches, visit the Health and Wellness Tips page found at [www.aca-today.org/patients](http://www.aca-today.org/patients).

Consult your chiropractic physician prior to attempting any of these exercises or stretches and before starting any new exercise program. He or she can help you develop an individualized program and provide instruction on proper technique. ■



### Quick Tips

- Never stretch a cold muscle (minimum of five minutes light jogging, biking, dancing, etc. before stretching)
- Good form is extremely important when it comes to stretching – do not bounce!
- Do not limit yourself to the exercises that you enjoy or that you are good at—make sure you are stretching all of your major muscles groups.
- You stretch point is the point at which you feel the stretch, but not pain.
- Flexibility is unique to each individual. Do not try to mimic another person's stretch point.



For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at [www.acatoday.org](http://www.acatoday.org) or call 800-986-4636.

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