

Dynamic stretches

This routine will help you limber up for any sport and can serve as a warm-up. To see the complete sequence, go to www.health.harvard.edu/dynamic-stretches.



1. Shoulder rolls

Stand up straight with your feet hip-width apart and arms at your sides. Roll your shoulders up, back, and down. Your thumbs point forward as you start the move. Palms point forward, elbows slightly bent, as you finish each shoulder roll.



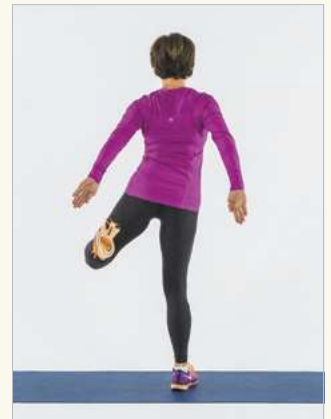
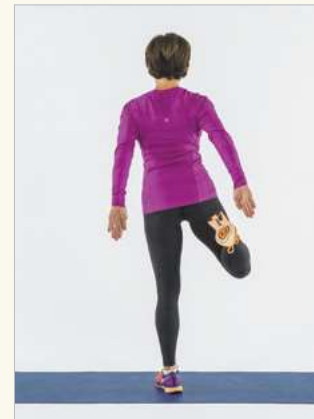
2. Overhead reach

Stand up straight with your feet hip-width apart. Reach toward the ceiling with your right arm, while shifting your weight from your right foot to your left foot and tapping the toes of the right foot. Repeat on the left.



3. Torso rotation with a reach

Stand up straight with your feet hip-width apart. Reach toward the left wall with your right arm and then the right wall with your left arm, while shifting your weight with each change of direction. Tap your toes with each shift.



4. Hamstring curls

Stand up straight with your feet hip-width apart. Alternately bend your right knee and then your left, bringing your right foot and then your left foot toward your buttocks. Press your arms backward as you do so.

5. Shallow side lunges

Stand up straight with your feet in a wide stance, toes pointing forward. Alternate shallow side lunges to the right and the left, hinging forward at the hip and bringing both hands to your upper thigh on the lunge.

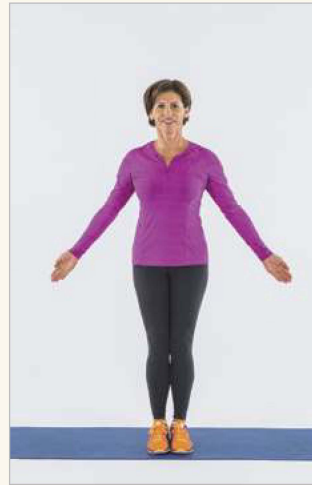


Dynamic stretches *continued*



6. Knee lifts

Stand up straight with your feet together. Lift your right knee and then your left knee, touching both hands to the knee being lifted. For a more challenging dynamic stretch, lift your knee high enough to grasp the top of your shin with your hands and pull your leg gently in toward your body, then release it.



7. Arm sweeps

Stand up straight with your feet together. As you inhale, sweep your arms out to the sides and up toward the ceiling. As you exhale, sweep your arms down to your sides.

Floor stretches

These 14 floor stretches are best performed on a cushioned mat, although a thick carpet or towels will do. If you find it difficult to lie on the floor, many of these stretches can be done while sitting on a chair. As you do the stretches, remember these points:

- Stretch to the point of mild tension, not pain.
- When holding the stretch, remain as still as possible, without bouncing.
- Breathe comfortably unless otherwise noted.



1 | Knees to chest

Primarily stretches the low back

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your back with your legs extended on the floor. Relax your shoulders against the floor.

Movement: Slowly bend your knees. Grasp the backs of your thighs, and gently pull your knees in toward your chest. Feel the stretch in your back. Hold. Return to the starting position.

Tips and techniques:

- Keep your head on the floor and your neck relaxed.
- You can bring your knees in one at a time to get into position if raising both at the same time is too difficult.
- For a more challenging stretch, raise your head off of the floor, bring your chin toward your chest, and hold.



2 | Single knee pull

Primarily stretches the low back, buttocks, and front of the hip

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your back with your legs extended on the floor. Relax your shoulders against the floor.

Movement: Bend your right knee. Grasp the back of your thigh and pull your knee in toward your chest. Flex your left foot and press the thigh and calf of that leg down toward the floor to feel a stretch in the front of your left hip and top of your left thigh. Hold. Return to the starting position and repeat with the other leg. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Keep your head on the floor and your neck relaxed.
- Keep the foot of your bent leg relaxed.
- For a more challenging stretch, raise your head off of the floor, bring your chin toward your chest, and hold.

Special thanks to Pilar Caso from the Baptiste Power Yoga Institute for demonstrating the yoga stretches. Master trainer Josie Gardiner modeled the floor stretches and standing stretches, while Dr. Lauren Elson demonstrated the seated stretches.



3 | Floor pretzel

Primarily stretches the buttocks, hip, and outer thigh

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your back with your right knee bent and foot on the floor. Rest your left ankle on your right thigh, just above your right knee. Your left knee should point out to the side, toward the wall. Grasp the back of your right thigh with both hands.

Movement: Slowly lift your right foot off the floor until you feel the stretch in your left hip and buttock. Hold. Return to the starting position. Repeat with your left knee bent and your right ankle resting on your left thigh, just above your left knee. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Keep your shoulders down and back, relaxing them against the floor.
- Keep your head on the floor and your neck relaxed.
- If it's too hard to grasp your thigh with both hands, put a strap or small towel around the back of the thigh and hold both ends.



4 | Single knee rotation

Primarily stretches the back, hip, and outer thigh

Reps: 2–4

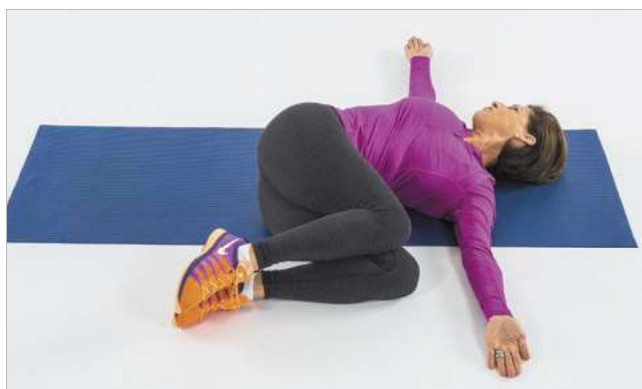
Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your back with your legs extended on the floor. Relax your shoulders against the floor and extend your arms out to the sides at shoulder level, palms up.

Movement: Bend your left knee and place your left foot on your right thigh just above the knee. Place your right hand on your left knee. Tighten your abdominal muscles, and slowly lower your left knee across your body toward the right wall. Feel the stretch in your low back and hip. Hold. Return to the starting position and repeat on the other side. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- The hip of your bent leg will come off of the floor as you rotate your lower body.
- Keep both shoulders flat on the floor. If one lifts up, don't rotate so far.
- To increase the stretch, look in the direction opposite to your knee rotation.



5 | Double knee torso rotation

Primarily stretches the back, chest, hips, and outer thighs

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet together, flat on the floor. Put your arms out comfortably to each side at shoulder level, palms up.

Movement: Tighten your abdominal muscles and lift both knees toward your chest, then lower them together to the left side on the floor. Keeping your shoulders relaxed and pressed into the floor, look in the opposite direction. Feel the stretch across your chest and torso and in your lower back and hip. Hold. Bring both knees back to center and return your right foot, then your left foot, to the floor. Repeat in the opposite direction. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Try to bring both knees up into the fetal position. Ideally, keep them together throughout the stretch.
- Keep both shoulders flat on the floor. If one lifts up, don't rotate so far.
- If necessary, put a rolled towel between your knees to make this stretch easier.



6 | Butterfly

Primarily stretches the inner thighs

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Sit on the floor with the soles of your feet together. Place your hands on your ankles. Let your knees fall apart toward the floor.

Movement: Hinge forward from your hips until you feel the stretch in your inner thighs. Hold. Return to the starting position.

Tips and techniques:

- Keep shoulders down and back throughout the stretch.
- One side is likely to be noticeably tighter. Focus on balancing the stretch.
- You can place pillows under your legs for support if the stretch is too challenging.
- For a greater stretch, press down on your legs with your elbows.



7 | Floor chest stretch

Primarily stretches the shoulders and chest

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Keeping your shoulders down and back, press them against the floor. Place both hands gently behind your head, elbows pointing toward the ceiling.

Movement: Slowly lower your elbows toward the floor to the point of tightness. Feel the stretch across your chest and into your shoulders and arms. Hold. Return to the starting position.

Tips and techniques:

- Don't arch your back.
- If necessary, limit the stretch by placing a small pillow on either side of your shoulders and gently pressing into the pillows.
- You can do this stretch while seated, too.



8 | Cobra

Primarily stretches the abdomen and chest

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie facedown with your forehead on the mat and legs comfortably extended with toes pointed. Place your hands just below your shoulders, palms facing down, and fingers together and parallel to your body.

Movement: Press your palms against the floor to slowly lift your head, shoulders, and chest. Keep your elbows back and soft, and your head and neck in neutral alignment. Feel the stretch down the front of your torso and across your chest. Hold. Return slowly to the starting position.

Tips and techniques:

- Keep your shoulders down and back, away from your ears, and your chest open. While holding, take full breaths by inhaling gently through your nose and lengthening the breath as you exhale through your nose.
- As you become stronger and more flexible, you may be able to fully extend your arms. Be careful not to lock your elbows in the fully extended position.

9 | Child's pose three ways

Primarily stretches the back, shoulders, arms, and sides

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds in each stretching position

Starting position: Position yourself on all fours, knees hip-width apart, big toes touching, and head and neck in neutral alignment.

Movement: This is a three-part stretch. Slowly drop your buttocks back toward your heels as you extend your hands in front of you and rest your forehead on the mat. Feel the stretch down your arms, shoulders, and back. Hold. Then walk your hands diagonally out to the right and place your left hand on top of your right hand. Feel the stretch down the left side of your body and your back. Hold. Then walk your hands diagonally out to the left and place your right hand on top of your left hand. Feel the stretch down the right side of your body and your back. Hold. Return to the starting position. That's one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Rest your forehead on the mat when holding this stretch.
- Lower your buttocks only as far as feels comfortable. If necessary, place a pillow or towel between your thighs and calves to limit the stretch.
- While holding, take full breaths by inhaling gently through your nose and lengthening the breath as you exhale through your nose.





10 | Cat-cow

Primarily stretches the back, chest, and abdomen

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Position yourself on all fours, knees hip-width apart. Align your shoulders over your wrists, and your hips over your knees. Keep your head and spine in neutral alignment.

Movement: Slowly arch your back upward like a scared cat as you exhale. Pull your belly button in toward your spine and tuck your chin. Feel the stretch along your back. Hold. Slowly drop your belly, pull your shoulders back, and lift your head up to look forward as you inhale. Feel the stretch across your chest and down the front of your torso. Hold. Slowly return to the starting position.

Tips and techniques:

- The slow movements of this stretch are like a wave of your spine.
- Don't strain your neck by looking up too high.
- While holding, take full breaths by inhaling gently through your nose and lengthening the breath as you exhale through your nose.



11 | Downward dog

Primarily stretches the back, hips, hamstrings, calves, shoulders, and chest

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Position yourself on all fours, hands shoulder-width apart, knees hip-width apart, and fingers extended. Align your shoulders over your wrists, and your hips over your knees. Keep your head and spine in neutral alignment.

Movement: Exhale as you lift your knees off the floor, straightening your legs without locking your knees. While maintaining a neutral neck and spine, align your ears with your biceps (upper arms). Try to keep your weight evenly distributed between your hands and feet. Press your heels down toward the floor, if possible, while keeping your shoulders down and rolled back. Feel the stretch down the backs of your legs, throughout your back, and into your shoulders and arms. Hold. Return to the starting position.

Tips and techniques:

- Soften your elbows and keep your shoulders down and rolled back as you lengthen your spine. Brace your abdominal muscles throughout.
- If necessary, bend your knees slightly and let your heels come up off the floor.
- While holding, take full breaths by inhaling gently through your nose and lengthening the breath as you exhale through your nose.



12 | Side-lying quadriceps stretch

Primarily stretches the front of the thigh

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Lie on your left side with your legs stacked and extended on the floor. Rest your left arm under your head.

Movement: Bend your right knee and bring your heel toward your right buttock, reaching back with your right hand to grasp your foot. Feel the stretch in the front of your thigh and hip. Hold. Slowly return to the starting position. Turn onto your other side and repeat. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Keep your hips stacked; don't roll forward or back.
- Don't arch your back.
- If you have trouble reaching your foot, place a strap around your ankle and gently pull the strap toward your buttocks.



13 | Kneeling hip flexor stretch

Primarily stretches the front of the hip and thigh

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Kneel with your hands at your sides.

Movement: Put your right leg in front of you with the knee bent at a 90-degree angle and foot flat on the floor. Place your hands on your right thigh for support. Lean forward, pressing into the hip of your left leg while keeping your right foot on the floor. Feel the stretch in the front of your left thigh and hip. Hold. Return to the starting position, then repeat with your left leg forward. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Keep your front knee over your ankle, not jutting out past your toes.
- Keep your head and spine neutral, your shoulders down and back, and your abdominal muscles tightened.
- Keep your pelvis tilted forward (tailbone tucked under), rather than letting it tip back (tailbone lifted).



14 | Torso rotation on all fours

Primarily stretches the back, torso, chest, arms, and sides

Reps: 2–4

Hold: 10–30 seconds

Starting position: Position yourself on all fours, aligning your hands and knees directly under your shoulders and hips.

Movement: Gently place your right hand behind your head. Slowly bring your right elbow down toward your left hand. Feel the stretch in your upper back and arm. Hold. Then rotate your elbow up toward the ceiling. Feel the stretch across the front and side of your torso. Hold. Return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side. This is one rep.

Tips and techniques:

- Keep your head and spine neutral, shoulders down and back, and abdominal muscles tightened.
- Follow your elbow with your eyes as you rotate toward the ceiling.
- Keep your hips squared. Don't let them jut out to the sides as you twist. ♥

For more information on this topic, visit

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/stretching-35-exercises-to-improve-flexibility-and-reduce-pain>