



Lower Body Stretching Guide

By Dr. Steven Dowell, Ashburn Sport & Spine

Why Stretch?

Muscle strains and tendonitis are frequently caused by muscles and joints that are too tight and restricted. By stretching the muscles you can help reduce the risk of these and other injuries as well as increase your over-all performance. In addition to maximizing your performance, a consistent stretch program provides the following:

- Injury prevention
- Improve range of motion
- Improve circulation to the muscles
- Improve posture

Technique:

A thorough warm-up and stretching routine can be completed in less than 10 minutes. Because a warm muscle will stretch further than a cold muscle, it is always best to do a quick warm-up. Jogging a few laps around the parking lot or even doing some jumping jacks will work great.

Because muscles will be warmest after a practice, greater gains in flexibility will be achieved by stretching at that time.

The following stretches should be performed by holding the stretch for each target muscle for 3 to 10 seconds, relaxing that muscle, then repeating for a total of 10 repetitions on each side.

Foot: Plantar Fascia

While on all fours, place your toes flat on the ground with your feet. Push back with your arms until you feel the stretch in your feet.



Ankle

Sit with your left leg straight. Bend your right leg and cross your right foot over and rest it to the outside of your left knee. Grab your right foot with your left hand to move the ankle. In addition, to circular motions of the ankle, be sure to point and flex your toes. Repeat the stretch on the other ankle.



Lower Leg & Calves

From a pushup position, place your left foot over your right heel. Your weight should be on the ball of your right foot. Push your right foot down flat to the ground, keeping your right leg straight. You should feel a stretch in your calf and ankle. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.



To isolate different muscles with this stretch add a bend into your knee. Bending your knee will shift the focus of the stretch onto the soleus muscle and the achilles tendon.



Upper Leg: Quads & Patellar Tendon

Gently pull the heel of your foot backwards until it touches your buttocks. Keep your head up and maintain an upright body position. Your knee should point towards the ground. To stretch other quad muscles with this stretch add some inward and outward rotation to the leg. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.



Inner Thigh: Adductors

Lunge slowly to the right, keeping your toes pointed straight ahead and feet flat. Squat by sitting back and down onto your right leg, keeping your left leg straight and the weight on the right foot's mid-foot to heel. Keep your head up and maintain an upright body position. Feel this stretch inside of your left thigh. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.



Pelvis: Hip Flexors & Iliopsoas

With your feet together, step forward into a lunge position. Keep your head up and maintain an upright body position. Feel this stretch at the point where your hip flexes. You may even feel this stretch up into the abdomen as well. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.



Posterior Upper Thigh: Hamstrings

While standing up straight, cross one leg over the other. Keep your low back flat and bend over until you feel the pulling in your rear leg. It's important to keep your back flat in this stretch. The best way to ensure this is to really emphasize sticking your buttocks out. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.

The first picture you see here is the improper way to perform the stretch. Always keep your back flat like in the second picture.



Upper & Lower Back: Erector Spinae, Latissimus Dorsi & Trapezius

Sit with your left leg straight. Bend your right leg, cross your right foot over and rest it to the outside of your left knee. Bend your left elbow and rest it on the outside of your upper right thigh. With your right arm behind you, rotate your upper body toward your right arm and hand. Use your left elbow to add a push to the right knee to further the stretch. You should feel a stretch in your lower back and possibly the outside of your right leg.





Outer Thigh: Iliotibial Band (ITB)

Stand upright and cross your right leg behind your left. Put your weight on your right leg and slightly lean forward and to the right. Your left foot should be parallel to your right. You should feel the stretch in your right hip and down the outside of your thigh. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.



Glutes: Gluteus Maximus & Piriformis

While lying on your back, bring your knees to your chest and cross your left leg over your right, placing your left ankle and foot on your right knee. Reach under your right thigh and pull towards the chest. You should feel this stretch in your glute region. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.



Glutes: Gluteus Maximus & Piriformis

While on your hands and knees, bend the left knee forward and then cross the left leg over the right leg. Put your weight on your left leg as you straighten the right leg behind you. Square your hips toward the floor. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.



Glutes: Gluteus Maximus & Piriformis

While lying on your back, lift your left leg towards your chest and then pivot your lower leg across your body. Grasp your left thigh with your left hand. Grasp your lower leg with your right hand and pull it towards the floor. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.

