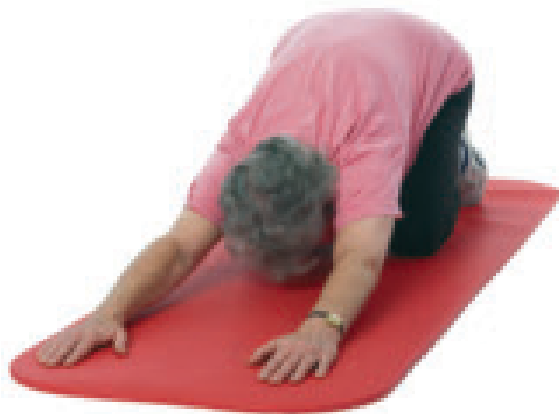


flexibility



Make it happen

Grace, age 66, has found that stretching exercises have become an important addition to her daily physical activity:

'I grew up on a farm and continued farming after I married. So I was used to hard work and plenty of physical activity. When my son and his family took over running the farm, I needed to find a way to stay active and healthy. Now I begin most mornings with a walk and stretches. Good thing, too! The stretching keeps me limber and the walking gives me plenty of stamina to keep up with my seven grandchildren. Physical activity helps me stay active in their lives and that makes it all worthwhile.'

How to improve your flexibility

Stretching or flexibility exercises are an important part of your physical activity program. They give you more freedom of movement for your physical and everyday activities, such as getting dressed and reaching objects on a shelf. Stretching exercises can improve your flexibility, but will not improve your endurance or strength.

How much, how often?

- Flexibility exercises can be included in your physical activity routine every day. Do each stretching exercise three to five times at each session.
- Always warm up before stretching exercises. Stretch after endurance or strength exercises. If you are doing only stretching exercises, warm up with a few minutes of easy walking first. Stretching your muscles before they are warmed up may result in injury.
- You can use the flexibility daily record in your workbook to keep track of your flexibility exercises.



About flexibility exercises

Talk with your doctor if you are unsure about a particular exercise. **If you have hip, back or shoulder problems or have had hip or back surgery, talk with your health professional before doing the stretching exercises in this chapter.**

How far?

- Stretching may feel slightly uncomfortable for example, a mild pulling feeling is normal.
- You are stretching too far if you feel sharp or stabbing pain, or joint pain while doing the stretch or even the next day. Reduce the stretch so that it doesn't hurt.

Stretching

- Slowly stretch into the desired position, as far as possible without pain, and hold the stretch for 10 to 30 seconds. Relax, breathe, then repeat, trying to stretch further.
- Maintain good posture and keep your abdominal and back muscles strong. Avoid arching your back.
- Never 'bounce' into a stretch. Make slow, steady movements instead. Jerking into position can cause muscles to tighten, possibly causing injury.
- Avoid 'locking' your joints. Straighten your arms and legs when you stretch them, but don't hold them tightly in a straight position. Your joints should always be slightly bent while stretching.

Breathing

- Always remember to breathe normally while holding a stretch.

Progressing

You can progress in your stretching exercises. As you become more flexible, try reaching further (but not so far that it hurts) or hold positions for longer.

Making it real !

How easy is it for you to turn around in the car and look behind you before backing out of a parking space? What about bending down to tie your shoes? Flexibility exercises will help you do both more easily.



Back 1



This exercise stretches your back muscles.

1. Sit securely toward the front of a sturdy, armless chair with your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.
2. Slowly bend forward from your hips. Keep your back and neck straight so you are looking down at the floor.
3. Slightly relax your neck and lower your chin. Slowly bend further forward and slide your hands down your legs toward your shins. Stop when you feel a stretch or slight discomfort.
4. Hold for 10–30 seconds.
5. Straighten up slowly all the way to the starting position.
6. Repeat at least three–five times.

As you progress:

Level 2: Bend as far forward as you can and eventually touch your heels.

Level 3: Build up to touching your toes while standing, keeping your back straight and knees slightly bent.



This exercise will help you do activities that require you to twist or turn to look behind you, such as backing out of a parking space or swinging a golf club.

Back 2



1. Sit up toward the front of a sturdy chair with armrests. Stay as straight as possible. Keep your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.
2. Slowly twist to the left from your waist without moving your hips. Turn your head to the left. Lift your left hand and hold on to the left arm of the chair. Place your right hand on the outside of your left thigh. Twist further, if possible.
3. Hold the position for 10–30 seconds.
4. Slowly return to face forward.
5. Repeat on the right side.
6. Repeat at least three–five more times.

As you progress:

Level 2: Try lifting your left arm and resting it comfortably on the back of the chair. Hold on to the left armrest with your right arm. Repeat on right side.

Shoulder



This exercise is good for your shoulders and upper-back muscles.

1. Sit in a sturdy, armless chair with your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.
2. Hold arms in front of you at shoulder height, palms facing down and hands side by side.
3. Relax your shoulders, keep your upper body still and reach forward with your hands. Stop when you feel a stretch or slight discomfort.
4. Hold position for 10–30 seconds.
5. Sit back up.
6. Repeat at least three–five times.

As you progress:

Level 2: With your arms out in front, cross your arms and interlace your fingers as shown in the small picture.

Level 3: Bend forward keeping your back straight, cross your arms and grasp behind your knees.



This exercise to stretch your shoulder and chest muscles will help improve your posture.

Shoulder/chest



As an alternative

Stand or sit in a sturdy chair, hold your arms out to the side at shoulder height with palms facing forward, slowly move your arms back while squeezing your shoulder blades together and hold as above.

1. Stand back against a wall, feet shoulder-width apart and arms at shoulder height.
2. Bend your elbows so your fingertips point toward the ceiling and touch the wall behind you. Stop when you feel a stretch or slight discomfort, and stop immediately if you feel sharp pain.
3. Hold position for 10–30 seconds.
4. Let your arms slowly roll forward, remaining bent at the elbows, to point toward the floor and touch the wall again, if possible. Stop when you feel a stretch or slight discomfort.
5. Hold position for 10–30 seconds.
6. Alternate pointing your fingertips above your head, then toward the floor.
7. Repeat at least three–five times.

Shoulder and upper arm



This exercise to increase flexibility in your shoulders and upper arms will help make it easier to reach for your seatbelt.

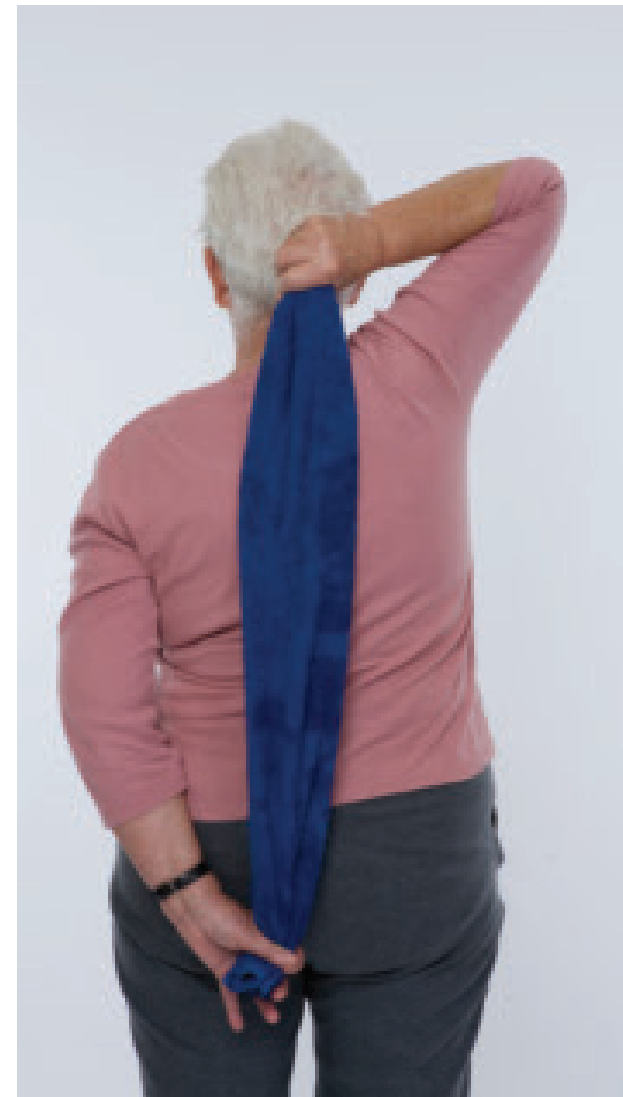
1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Hold one end of a towel in your right hand.
3. Raise and bend your right arm to drape the towel down your back. Keep your right arm in this position and continue holding on to the towel.
4. Reach behind your lower back and grasp the towel with your left hand.
5. To stretch your right shoulder, pull the towel down with your left hand. Stop when you feel a stretch or slight discomfort in your right shoulder.
6. Repeat at least three–five times.
7. Reverse positions and repeat at least three–five times.

As you progress:



Level 2: Try gradually decreasing the distance between your top and bottom hands.

Level 3: Try completing the exercise without a towel, eventually making the fingertips of your two hands touch.



This exercise increases the flexibility of your arms, chest and shoulders and will help you reach items on the upper shelves of your wardrobe or kitchen cupboard.



Upper body

1. Stand facing a wall slightly further than arm's length from the wall, feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Lean your body forward and put your palms flat against the wall at shoulder height and shoulder-width apart.
3. Keeping your back straight, slowly walk your hands up the wall until your arms are above your head.
4. Hold your arms overhead for about 10–30 seconds.
5. Slowly walk your hands back down.
6. Repeat at least three–five times.

As you progress:

Level 2: Gradually reach higher up the wall.