



Prevention

STRETCHING MADE EASY

Your guide to
feeling your best
from head to toe.

WHY STRETCH AT ALL

Moving with greater ease is one of the most direct benefits of stretching regularly. The practice both prevents pain and alleviates it, by lengthening your muscles to improve your range of motion. **BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE!** Fringe benefits of stretching include improved sleep, better balance, and more energy. Use this guide to learn crucial stretches for a happier body.

3/STEPS TO THE PERFECT STRETCH

1 / WATCH THE CLOCK.

To get better at holding stretches, make the clock your accountability partner. If you can comfortably hold a stretch for 30 seconds, for instance, try for five more seconds the next time.

2 / COUNT YOUR BREATH.

At the start, inhale for eight seconds, and as you deepen into the stretch, exhale for eight. This will help you move through the body's stretch reflex, which is telling you "Don't pass go." A little discomfort is OK, but if you feel pain, stop.

3 / DON'T LOCK YOUR JOINTS.

Depending on your range of motion, you can bend your knees in order to flex your hips more for a better stretch. Then, over time, you can work on straightening your knees.

OTHER WAYS TO STAY LIMBER

These simple habits will help loosen you up for pain-free walks, workouts, and everyday life!



DRINK UP

Our bodies are made up mostly of water, and much of that H₂O is in our fascia—the web of connective tissues

that runs all throughout the body to help keep muscles, joints, tendons, and bones in their places. If you're underhydrated or dehydrated, the tissue will be dry and brittle, not wet and spongy. That can lead to compromised mobility. Down your eight glasses of water daily—plus a glass or two extra on days you're sweating hard or if it is hot out—to replace what you lose in sweat.

START THE DAY WITH A STRETCH

Even a quick forward fold can help break up collagen in your fascia, allowing more oxygen to hit your muscles and setting you up for better movement all day long. To really reduce tension, hold stretches for five minutes or longer.

GIVE YOURSELF SOME TLC

Relieving kinks improves range of motion and slashes soreness. Why? Kneading soft tissue with a foam roller helps remove collagen buildup and raise muscle temperature, which amps blood flow to pump nutrients to the area and flush waste. Roll until you feel a release, or try a warm bath with Epsom salts or some self massage.

EAT YOUR FRUITS AND VEGGIES

High levels of inflammation throughout the body can cause muscle soreness or pain. But a diet that's packed with fresh produce and healthy fats and light on processed foods (a favorite one to follow is the Mediterranean style) can help zap this inflammation.

FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE

Break up long periods of sitting to help prevent muscles from getting tight or stiff. Pace during phone calls, get up to refill your water bottle or coffee mug, and make inactive moments (like zoning out during commercials) active by doing a few squats or calf raises instead.



HOW LONG SHOULD YOU HOLD A STRETCH?

It depends on what your goal is!

■ To get more flexible:

To increase your range of motion, hold stretches (like those on page TK) from two to five minutes. These should be done when you're already warm, are not about to exert yourself further, and have some time to relax. The best times include right after a workout, right before bed, or after a hot shower.

■ To wake up or prep for a workout:

In this case, do dynamic stretching (see page TK), which means you don't hold the stretch in one position for more than 30 seconds. Oscillate between the start and end positions, and move around in the stretch. Active stretches like these help to get the blood flowing and warm up the muscles.

7 STRETCHES EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW

Learn these and you'll always have a reliable, whole-body routine at the ready. Do them any time of day or before or after a workout. They're that versatile! Follow along with trainer **Kymerly Nolden** and feel your best.



KNEELING WRIST STRETCHES

GREAT FOR:
Wrists / Forearms

Begin on the floor with your hands under your shoulders and your knees beneath your hips. With palms down and fingers facing away from you, lean forward as your palms remain glued to the ground. Reach a challenging point in your range of motion and hold. To stretch your wrists from a different angle, point your fingers toward your body and sit back toward your heels as your palms remain on the ground. Hold again for your chosen length of time.



STANDING FORWARD FOLD

GREAT FOR:
Hamstrings / Lower Back

Stand tall with your feet directly beneath your hips. Then bend forward and reach your hands as far as you can. You can touch the floor or your toes or grab the backs of your calves, whatever feels good. Keep your neck in line with your spine, relax, and let gravity do the work. If you're feeling particularly tight, bend those knees and place your hands on blocks or a chair.





THREAD THE NEEDLE



GREAT FOR: Back / Shoulders

Begin from the tabletop position with your hands and knees on the floor. Extend your right arm to the ceiling. Thread the same arm through the space between your left wrist and right knee. Extend your left arm straight in front of you. Rest your weight on your right arm until you feel a stretch at the back of your right shoulder. Hold, then switch over to the other side.



LYING CALF STRETCH

GREAT FOR: Calves / Hamstrings

Grab a yoga strap, a resistance band, or a towel and lie back on the floor with knees slightly bent. Loop your strap around the ball of one foot while holding one end in each hand. Then flex your toes toward your face until you feel a stretch in your calf.



KNEELING HIP FLEXOR STRETCH

GREAT FOR: Hips / Core

How to do it: Kneel on the floor with one knee up at 90 degrees and the other flat on the ground. Place your hands on your hips for balance. Squeeze your butt, then gradually shift your weight forward as you keep your torso upright. Once you feel a stretch in your hips, hold the position at your end range of motion. Never force yourself to go farther. To intensify the stretch, lengthen your arm toward the ceiling and lift your chest upward.





↑ PIGEON POSE **GREAT FOR:**
Hips / Quads

Start in a tabletop position with your hands and knees on the floor, keeping your knees beneath your hips. Bring your left leg behind you, then bring your right as close as possible to parallel with the front of your mat. Begin to sit onto your right hip as you lengthen your left leg and hold for some incredible hip-opening action. If the stretch feels too intense, support your right hip with a pillow or a folded blanket. Breathe. Make sure to stretch both sides.



← STANDING BACK ARCH

GREAT FOR:
Shoulders / Upper Back / Pecs

Stand tall with your feet flat on the floor, then clasp your hands behind your back. Look toward the ceiling and raise your chest toward the sky as you pinch your shoulder blades together. Feel the stretch in your pecs and the fronts of your shoulders.

STRETCHING ON THE MOVE

Ever done a “warm-up” in a workout video or class and thought, “Uh, this feels like I’m working out already!”? Trainers love what’s called **dynamic stretching**, which you do while in motion—so it definitely gets your heart pumping and sweat going. This kind of stretching is worth doing, though, because it primes your body for more movement, making your workouts more effective and you less prone to injury. Try this set at the start of your next exercise session!

DOWNWARD DOG TO COBRA

1 Begin in downward dog: Get on the floor on your hands and knees, making sure your hands are about shoulder-width apart and your fingers and toes are pointed forward. Lift your butt toward the ceiling and gently straighten your knees, adjusting

the spacing of your hands and feet as needed so you can keep your heels on the floor. Press through your palms and firm your outer arms as you sink into this stretch. Hold for 30 seconds.

2 Transition to cobra stretch by bending your arms and lowering your body to the floor. Then, keeping your pelvis connected with the floor, press yourself up onto your hands so your arms straighten, your lower back is arched, and your abdo-

men is stretched. Look up toward the ceiling as you do so. Lift your chest and roll your shoulders back as you ground your legs. Inhale. Hold for 30 seconds.

3 Repeat this back-and-forth sequence three to five times to help get the blood flowing and the muscles on opposite sides of your body warmed up and lengthened.



AVOID LOWER BACK PAIN in cobra by tucking your pelvis so your pubic bone comes toward the floor. If you feel any pain in your lower back, modify by coming up onto only your forearms (not to straight arms).



WALKING LUNGES

- 1** To begin, stand with your hands either on your hips or out to the sides for balance.
- 2** Take a large, exaggerated step with your right leg and lower yourself to the floor, controlling the lowering with your right leg while using your left leg to help you balance.
- 3** Rise back to standing and alternate, taking the next exaggerated step with your left leg before descending to the floor and rising again.
- 4** Repeat for 60 seconds or 10 times on each side.

ARM SWINGS

- 1** Stand with your feet about hip-width apart.
- 2** Swing your arms forward and backward for several seconds, then swing them in and out (as if hugging yourself) for several seconds.
- 3** Continue for 30 to 60 seconds, alternating between the movements.



The stretching "SWEET SPOT," generally speaking, should be slightly uncomfortable but not painful. Pain means something isn't right, so start with smaller movements and gradually make them bigger.



HIGH KNEES

- 1** Start in a standing position, then hop from one leg to the other, raising the leg in the air to hip height each time (higher if you can, but that's not necessary). It may help to stretch your arms in front of you and tap your knees with your hands as you go.
- 2** Continue hopping for 30 to 60 seconds.



MORE MOVES TO TRY

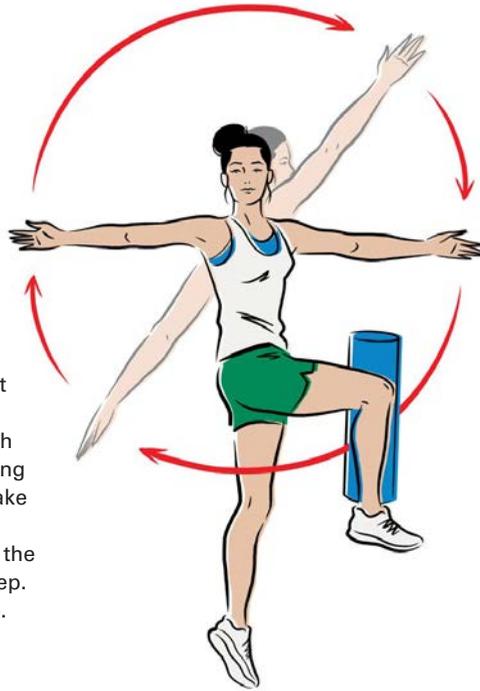
Learn 50+ stretches, plus how to put them together, in *Prevention's* stretching book and DVD bundle (\$45, shop prevention.com).

WATCH OUT FOR WEAK SPOTS

These dynamic stretches are great for areas of the body that are particularly prone to injury. Walkers and runners especially, take note!

SIDE-LYING WINDMILLS →

■ Lie on your left side and rest your right knee on a foam roller or rolled-up towel, bent at 90 degrees in front of you. Stretch both arms out in front of you, softly sliding your shoulder blades down your back. Take a deep breath in, then slowly draw your right arm overhead in a circle, matching the movement to a full exhalation. That's 1 rep. Do 1 to 2 sets of 3 to 5 reps on each side.



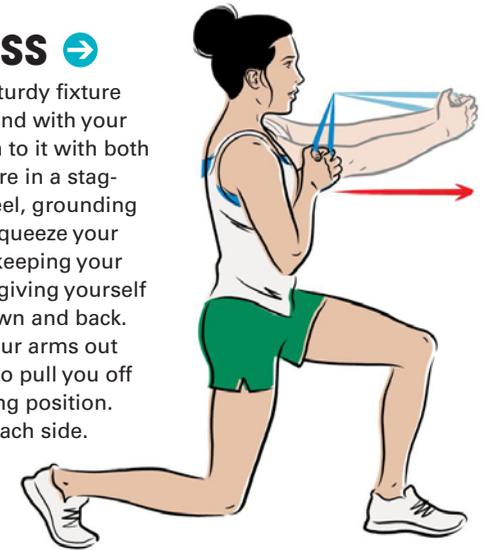
← 90/90 FLOW

■ Sit on the floor with your left leg bent at 90 degrees in front of you and your right leg bent at 90 degrees with your foot behind you. Keep your spine straight. Leaning forward will increase the glute stretch. Pressing your heels into the floor, lift your knees, keeping your trunk as long as you can. Slowly swivel your knees so you bring your left leg into a 90-degree bend in front of you, and your right leg into a 90-degree bend behind you. That's 1 rep. Do 10, then re-peat move 2.



SPLIT-STANCE PRESS →

■ Wrap a resistance band around a sturdy fixture and hold it just below chest level. Stand with your right side facing the band, holding on to it with both hands. Step your left leg back so you're in a staggered lunge stance. Raise your left heel, grounding your right foot firmly into the floor. Squeeze your glutes and tuck your tailbone under, keeping your torso long, chin tucked—think about giving yourself a double chin. Set your shoulders down and back. Inhale deeply. As you exhale, push your arms out in front of you. Don't allow the band to pull you off center. Return your arms to the starting position. That's 1 rep. Do 2 sets of 10 reps on each side.



← FOOT CIRCLES

■ Stand barefoot, feet parallel, at the center of an imaginary clock face. Imagine you're gliding a coin along the floor with your right foot. Reach it forward to 12 o'clock, extending your right leg and keeping all your weight on your left foot—avoid locking your standing leg. Return to the starting position. Repeat to 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 o'clock. You can turn out your hip as you move, but keep your left foot on the ground and avoid tensing or gripping with your toes. That's 1 rep. Do 2 sets of 3 reps on each foot.



REPAIR & REVIVE

Each pair of moves here, designed by trainer **Larysa Didio**, is designed to release tightness and reduce aches and pains. Learn exactly how to use a foam roller, then stretch your body to get the maximum benefit. It's a powerful, healing combo.



NECK ADJUSTER

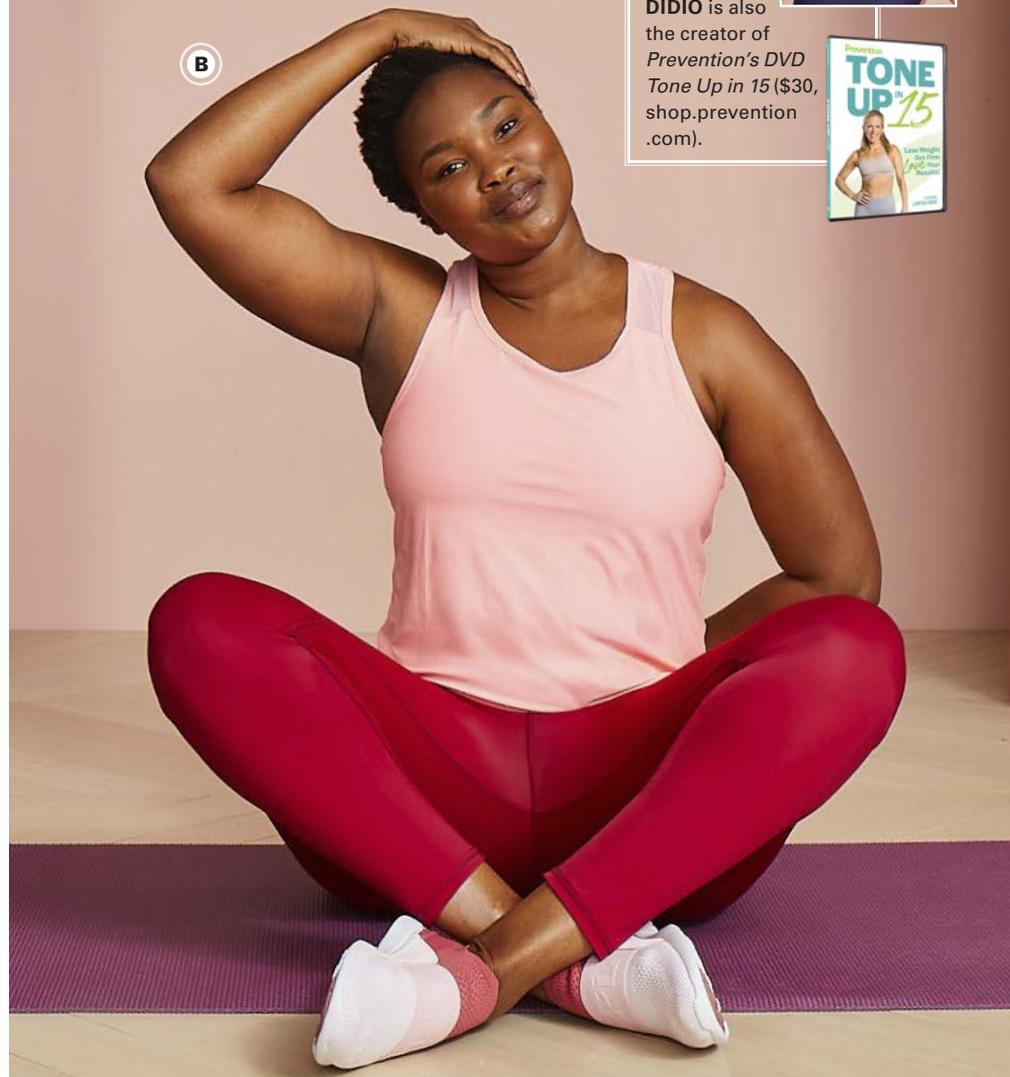
This pair of moves will open up your neck and upper back and relieve pain.

PART A / DIG Using a ball, lie on your back with your knees bent. Lie on top of the ball so it's situated between your neck and upper shoulder blades (scapula). Raise your hips and push your body into the ball. Gently roll your upper back and lower neck area (breathing and relaxing) in a back-and-forth motion for 30 to 60 seconds. Pause and give extra time to supersensitive areas. Repeat on the other side.

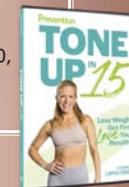
PART B / STRETCH

In a crisscross seated position, place your left arm (bent) behind your body. Place your right hand on your head. While pressing your left shoulder down, gently pull your head to your right shoulder. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

B



LARYSA DIDIO is also the creator of Prevention's DVD *Tone Up in 15* (\$30, shop.prevention.com).





HIP HUGGER

This exercise will release and open up your hip flexors and relieve pain in your hips and back.

PART A / DIG Using a ball and facing down, lay your body over the ball so the ball is directly under your hip flexors (located between your hip and thigh bones). Gently roll your hip area (breathing and relaxing) in a back-and-forth motion for 30 to 60 seconds. Pause and give extra time to super-sensitive areas. Repeat on the other side.

PART B / STRETCH Using a yoga block or a book, start on your hands and knees. Place your left foot forward with your knee bent; place the block parallel with and to the right of your foot. With your right hand on the block and your left hand on your thigh, bend your left knee and lean your hips and body forward. Keep your abs tight. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side.



LEG LOOSENER

Try this to open up your IT band (the fascia on the side of your leg) and relieve pain in your legs, hips, knees, and back.

PART A / DIG Using a ball or a foam roller and lying on your right side, place the ball under your right hip and extend your right leg out straight. Cross your left leg over your right. Using your arms for leverage and support, roll the roller up and down your right leg, from your hip to your knee, for

30 to 60 seconds. Pause and give extra time to supersensitive areas. Repeat on the other side.

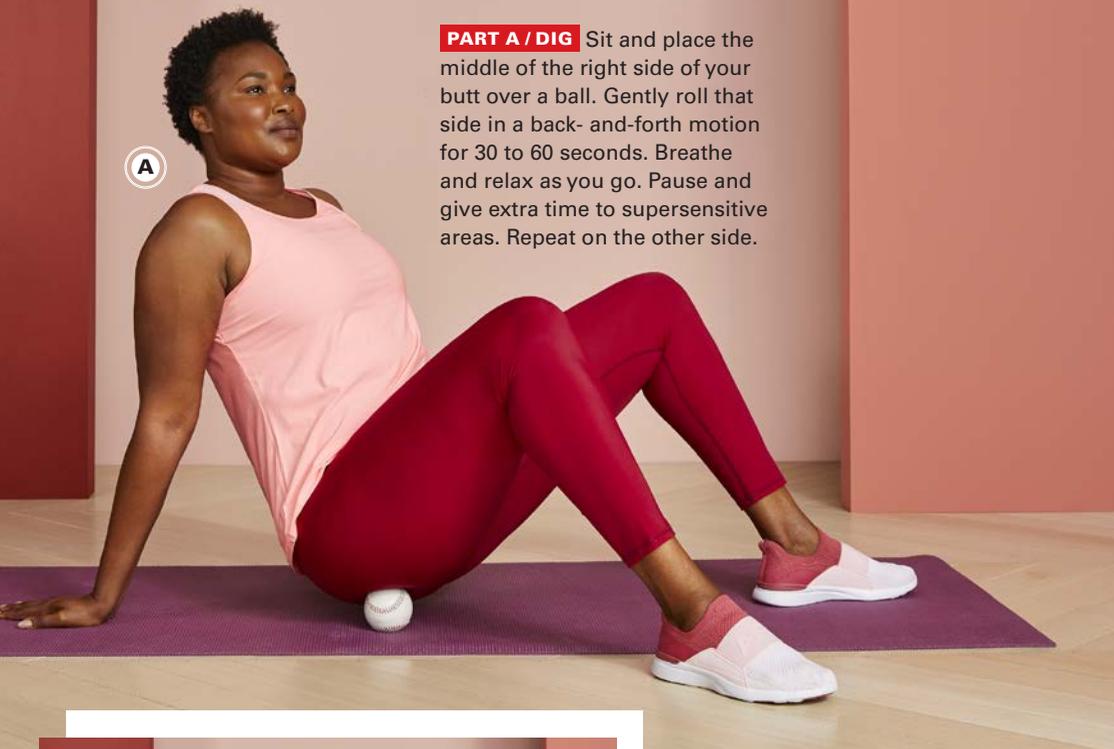
PART B / STRETCH Using a yoga strap or a towel, extend your left leg up and place the middle of the strap over the arch of your left foot. Gather the straps in your right hand while extending your right leg on the floor and leaving your left arm at your side. Using the straps, pull your left leg (straightened) across to your right. Your abs should be tight. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side.



GLUTE FIXER

This move can release your piriformis muscle (deep in the buttocks) and relieve pain in your hips and back.

PART A / DIG Sit and place the middle of the right side of your butt over a ball. Gently roll that side in a back- and-forth motion for 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe and relax as you go. Pause and give extra time to supersensitive areas. Repeat on the other side.



PART B / STRETCH Lie on your back and cross your right ankle over your left knee. Place your right hand on the outside of your right knee and your left hand on your ankle. Pull your knee to your chest. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side.



POSTURE PERFECT

Try this exercise to release and open up your back, shoulders, and neck while improving posture and relieving pain.

PART A / DIG Start seated on the floor, with a foam roller behind you. Gently lie back on the roller so the middle of your back is on the roller and your hips and feet (bend your knees) are on the floor.

Place your hands behind your head (elbows out to the side), then lift your hips and roll your upper body gently back and forth over the roller for 30 to 60 seconds.

PART B / STRETCH Lie on the foam roller with one end under your tailbone and the other end under your head (the roller should be against your spine). Place your arms out to the side with your palms up and your elbows bent at 90 degrees. Relax, breathe, and let your chest stretch and open. Hold for 5 minutes or more.





STRETCH YOURSELF HEALTHY

When you're not feeling at the top of your game, these moves can help you work out what's ailing you.

FEELING SLUGGISH?

■ Plug into your own power source: This move flexes the major muscle groups in your legs and core, and activating them can release endorphins. Stand with your feet together and bend your knees deeply as if sitting in a chair. Reach your fingers toward the ceiling, squeeze your arms by your ears, and take up to 10 deep breaths.



BELLY BLOATED?

■ When you're feeling uncomfortably full around the middle, try this move to help relax and stretch the intestines. Stand with your feet shoulder distance apart and keep your toes and heels grounded as you exhale; bend your knees and slowly lower into a squat position. Bringing your palms together, rest your arms against your inner knees and relax your shoulders. (Sit on a firm pillow if needed.) Hold for 10 breaths.



BACK ACHING?

■ When you twist to one side, you release the muscles on the other side of a sore back (which feels so "Ahhh..."). Lie on your back with your arms extended to your sides; bring your left knee across your body and let it drop toward the floor. Turn your head to the left. Breathe and relax for a minute. Switch sides.

CAN'T SLEEP?

■ A variation on the pigeon pose puts you into a personal cocoon. From your hands and knees, bring your right leg forward, placing your right knee on the floor. Slide your left leg back, then lower your forehead. It's okay if you can't reach the floor, but do relax your neck muscles. Hold for 10 breaths; switch sides.



IN A LOUSY MOOD?

■ Find your happier place with a mini backbend: It helps stimulate the vagus nerve at the base of the brain, which can trigger the release of feel-good hormones. Start in a kneeling position (pop a folded towel under your knees for comfort). Put your hands on your backside with fingers pointed toward the floor. Exhale and begin to lean back slightly; lift your chest toward the ceiling, keeping your belly tight and using your hands to stabilize your back.



OVERDID IT LAST NIGHT?

■ If you had a little too much wine or rich food, gentle twists are thought to stimulate the liver and kidneys, which helps rid the body of toxins. Sit with your legs extended, bend your left knee, and place your left palm on the floor behind you. Reach your right fingertips toward the ceiling and turn toward the left, looking over your shoulder. Then bend your right arm and hook your elbow onto the outside of your left knee. Take 10 breaths; switch sides.

BEST MOVES TO MANAGE STRESS

These stretches can calm the mind and counter your body's stress responses, which can include muscletension and stomach pain.

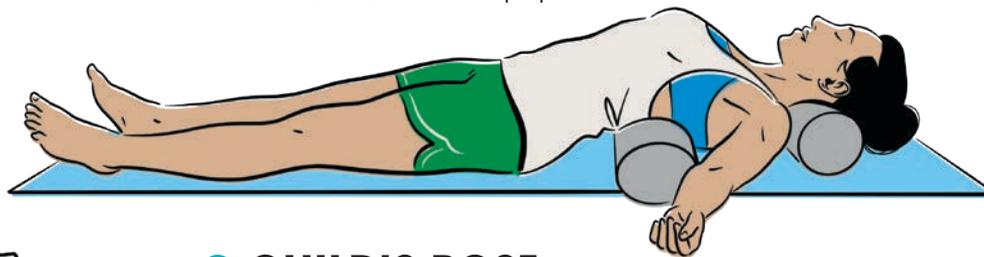
CAT COW →

■ Start in tabletop position, with your wrists underneath your shoulders and knees underneath your hips. Inhale into cow pose, dropping your stomach down to arch your spine and gazing upward. Exhale into cat pose, rounding your back, tucking your pelvis under, and dropping your head. Continue moving through cow to cat for 5 full breaths.



↓ RESTORATIVE FISH POSE

■ Place a pillow or block parallel to the short edge of your mat. Gently lie back over the prop, so the bottom edge is level with your bra strap. You can use another pillow or block to support your head if you need it. Melt your body over the prop(s) and place your arms by your sides, or overhead—wherever is most comfortable. Hold the pose for at least 1 minute. To get out of the pose, roll to one side and remove the prop.



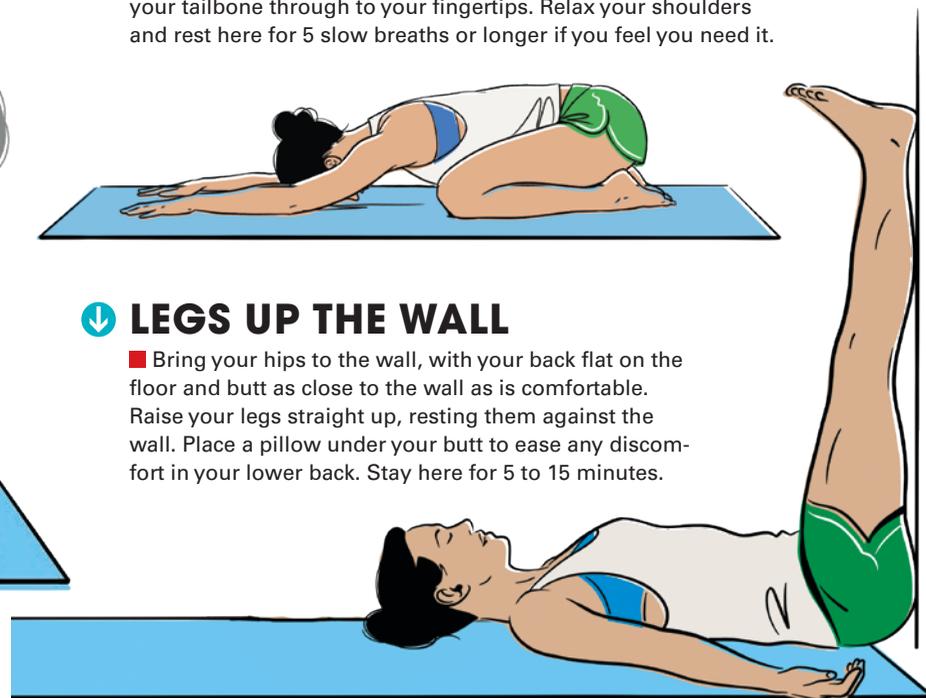
↓ CHILD'S POSE

■ Kneel on the floor with your big toes together and knees wide. Exhale and lay your torso down between your thighs, keeping your spine long. Stretch your arms forward, feeling a stretch from your tailbone through to your fingertips. Relax your shoulders and rest here for 5 slow breaths or longer if you feel you need it.



↓ LEGS UP THE WALL

■ Bring your hips to the wall, with your back flat on the floor and butt as close to the wall as is comfortable. Raise your legs straight up, resting them against the wall. Place a pillow under your butt to ease any discomfort in your lower back. Stay here for 5 to 15 minutes.



IF YOU DO ONE MOVE...

Make it this one. This low lunge gives your hip flexors, the oft-overlooked muscles at the top of your thighs, a serious stretch. Not only will it feel great, it'll make literally everything you do—walking, running, even sitting—feel better.

1 Place a folded blanket, a stack of folded towels, or a cushion on the ground. Get into tabletop position, hovering above it on your hands and knees.

2 Slowly step your right foot forward so your toes are in line with your fingertips; your right knee should be in line with your right ankle. If you have

yoga blocks, brace yourself with one on each side.

3 Extend your left leg behind you; the top of your foot should be resting on the ground with your knee and shin on top of the blanket, towels, or cushion. Lean into the stretch by gently lowering your hip and pelvis toward the floor.

4 Try to keep your back straight and tall, head facing forward, and breathe. Repeat on the other side.

