

Starting Stretching

New: Version 6 released November 29, 2012. See the Changelog at the bottom for details

Overview

Many people want to improve overall flexibility, but do not know where to begin. This guide should serve as a general jumping-off point for beginners. If you wish you could move your limbs *a little bit more*, or bend just a few extra inches, this program should help

This program is intended to go hand-in-hand with **Molding Mobility**

A word of note: I am not haughty enough to say that this program is anywhere NEAR the quality of Starting Strength, and I am not a professional. The title is simply my attempt at a joke – don't read too much into it.

Additionally, always consult with a doctor if you have any injuries, and stop doing things if they produce pain. I am not a medical professional, and cannot afford a lawyer, so use this program at your own risk.

The Program

This program covers a series of 9 stretches – 3 upper body, 4 lower body, and 2 torso. Each is to be done for a total of 60 seconds. Doing this in one stretch is the best, but if you need to stretch for 30s, relax, and finish 30s, that is fine too. Try not to go lower than 20s intervals – if you can't do a stretch for at least 20s, lessen the intensity.

These stretches are to be performed in succession after **every single** workout. This should take only 20–30 minutes. It is recommended, however to do them every single day. If you have time, repeating the stretches 2–3 times is also recommended.

Shoulder Extension:

Place your hands on some object that is overhead, while keeping your arms straight. You may bend forward to an object, as long as it is still "overhead". Attempt to push your head and chest *through* so that the arms are pressed behind the body. **Variation 1**, **Variation 2**.

Beginner: As above, with palms facing down

Intermediate: Place your elbows on the object and bring the hands together as if you were praying.

Advanced: Rotate the palms facing upward. Holding a stick might be useful to help keep the hands from rotating. Alternatively, a dead hang from a bar in a chinup grip might be used.

Underarm Shoulder Stretch:

While seated, place your hands behind you on the ground, fingers pointing away, and slide your butt forward, keeping the arms straight. **Example**. This can also be done by placing your hands behind you on a tall object, and squatting/crouching down.

Beginner: As above, keeping hands on the ground, approximately shoulder width.

Intermediate: Use a stick or resistance band to keep arms narrower than shoulder width.

Advanced: Do this while hanging from a bar. Also known as a "German Hang"

Rear Hand Clasp:

With one hand overhead and the other hand behind your lower back, attempt to grasp fingertips behind your back. Make sure to do this on both sides. **Example Video**

Beginner: Use a towel or strap to bring the hands together

Intermediate: Grab opposing fingers or hands

Advanced: Grab opposing wrists

Full Squat:

Keeping the heels on the ground, squat down as far as your body will allow. Keep your arms inside the knees and press them outward. **Example**. Feel free to hold on to something for balance, as it should not affect the stretch, but free balancing is preferred.

Beginner: Just get into the position and hold

Intermediate: Work on sitting up as straight as possible. Chest and head held high

Advanced: Sit up vertically and attempt to keep the toes pointed forward

Standing Pike:

Bend forward, *hinging at the hips* while trying to keep the back flat. Do not try to touch your toes – instead, try to touch the ground 1–2 feet in front of your toes. This will help you hinge at the hips and not bend at the back. When you can get decently below parallel with a flat back, then you can grab your calves and attempt to pull your head to your knees. See [here](#) and [here](#) for pictures.

Note: When returning from the stretch, bend your knees and let your hips drop, before lifting your upper body up. Stand up as if squatting. Doing otherwise can risk back injury

Beginner: Forward bend with a flat back

Intermediate: When below parallel with a flat back grab your calves and pull your knees to your chest

Advanced: Pull your knees to your chest without using your arms to pull

Kneeling Lunge:

Kneel on the ground and place one foot in front of you, flat on the ground, in a lunge position with the back knee and top of foot on the ground. Squeeze the glutes and press the pelvis forward, stretching the rear leg. Move the front foot forward as needed to ensure the front shin remains roughly vertical. Ensure the torso remains vertical, and not bending backwards or leaning forwards.

This is the **Kneeling Lunge**.

Beginner: Perform the kneeling lunge with hands on the front leg, supporting some of the torso

Intermediate: Keep the hands at the side of the torso, with palms facing forward and shoulders pulled back

Advanced: Raise the rear leg up against your glutes and hold with both arms

Butterfly

Sit on the ground, and bring the bottoms of your feet together in front of you. Hold your feet together with your hands and pull them slightly towards you. Actively try to press your knees towards the ground. See [here](#) for more instruction

Beginner: Use strength alone to push the knees towards the floor.

Intermediate: Lean forward slightly (**with a flat back**) and press the legs towards the floor by using your elbows.

Advanced: Lean forward with a flat back, attempting to touch both your chest to your legs and your knees to the ground.

Backbend:

Backbends are fairly difficult for people who have never done them, so we're going to scale it with a few other stretches first. With any of these stretches, if you feel pinching in the lower back, you're doing it wrong. Take a step back and don't push so hard.

Beginner: **Glute Bridge**. While lying on your back, bend your knees and put your feet near your buttocks. By squeezing the glutes, lift the hips and pelvis off the floor and press it towards the ceiling.

Intermediate: **Camel**. Kneel on your shins on the ground. Curl the toes under your feet, and reach behind you, grabbing the heels with the respective hand. From here, squeeze the glutes and push the pelvis forward as much as possible while holding onto the heels. Look upward and pull the shoulders back. You may need to use blocks or pillows to raise the heels higher at first.

Advanced: **Bridge/Wheel**. Lie on your back with your knees bent and pulled into your glutes. Place your hands on the ground beside your head, with fingers pointing down towards your shoulders. From here, press with the arms and glutes to lift yourself onto the top of your head. Hold this position for time. As you get better in this position, you will eventually be able to lift your head off the ground by pressing the arms straight. In doing this, make sure your shoulders remain above the hands and much as possible, and strive to straighten the legs.

Lying Twist:

Lie on the ground, facing upward, and extend your arms out to the sides. Lift one leg up at a 90 degree angle (bend the knee as much as necessary). Now lower the leg to the *opposite* side of the torso while keeping the shoulders on the ground. Attempt to touch the ground with the leg while maintaining shoulders on the floor. Turn the head in the

opposite direction of the leg. See [here](#) for an example. Repeat for both sides.

Beginner: Bend the knees at 90 degrees and press down with the arm to deepen the stretch

Intermediate: Use a straight leg (locked knee) and press down with the arm

Advanced: Use a straight leg and no arm assistance – use only muscular power to maintain the position

Weaknesses:

After every stretching session, it is also helpful to work on weaknesses. Choose 1–3 stretches above where you'd most like additional flexibility, and add those at the end. I'd also suggest wrist and ankle stretches here as well.

Followups

- **Attaining the Splits**

Changelog

- **Version 6:** (*Nov 29, 2012*) Removed Reclining Hero in favor of Kneeling Lunge. Revamped Bridge section as 'Backbend'
- **Version 5:** (*Mar 15, 2012*) Removed Standing Straddle in favor of Butterfly
- **Version 4:** (*Feb 6, 2012*) Added Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced steps for all stretches
- **Version 3:** (*Sep 13, 2011*) Moved Full Squat before lower body work. Moved Bridge before twist. Removed Camel from Back Bridge progression.
- **Version 2:** (*Sep 7, 2011*) Added Reclining Hero. Switched Seated Twist with Lying Twist.
- **Version 1:** (*Aug 15, 2011*) Original

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