

Conditioning Stretches

Basic stretching tips: Hold each of the stretches described here for at least thirty seconds. Do not abruptly go into a stretch, but ease into it. Do not bounce, which can tear muscles. Breathe steadily and deeply during the stretch. Do not hold a conversation with someone else while stretching; instead hold a conversation with your body and listen to what it is saying: where are the tight and stiff spots, what needs to be loosened up? You want to feel a slight burn in the muscles while stretching. Do not make it painful.



Calf stretch: Put the sole of the top half of your right foot against a wall or tree. Slide your right heel as close towards the wall/tree as possible. Slowly lean forward towards the wall stretching your calves. Once you have stretched your calf to the furthest comfortable position, hold for at least 15 seconds. Switch legs and repeat.

Hamstring stretch: Sit on the ground with one leg fully extended, and the other leg tucked in against your body. Gently reach for your toes, bending at the waist and keeping your entire leg firmly on the ground. You should feel a gentle stretch in your hamstrings. *Do not force it.* If your fingers cannot reach your toes, hold onto your leg wherever it is comfortable. Repeat the stretch on the other leg.

Standing leg stretch: Face a wall, a rock face, or tree. Lift one leg to groin level and brace the bottom of the foot against the hard surface. Slowly bend forward from the waist and hold the stretch for thirty seconds. Repeat with the other leg.



Quadriceps and knee stretch: Stand perpendicular to a wall or tree, place your right hand on the wall or tree for support. Raise the right foot behind you and grip the top of the foot with the left hand. Gently stretch your heel toward your buttocks. Repeat with the other foot. *Do not over do it.*

Toe-touch: Lower back, hip, groin, and hamstring stretch. With your feet shoulder-width apart, and feet pointed forward, slowly bend forward and over from the hips. Keep the knees slightly bent to prevent injury. Continue to bend over until you feel a good stretch in the back of your legs. Do not strain to touch your toes. Bend over only as far as is comfortable.



Upper body stretch: Stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart, and with your knees slightly bent. Reach both hands over your head, and hold one hand with the other hand. Bend slowly to one side until you feel the stretch. Repeat on the other side.

Chest opener: Stand tall, and put your arms outstretched behind you, lacing the fingers together. Lift the arms toward your shoulders, creating a gentle stretch in the chest.

Share stretches with others: These are just a few examples of stretches. There are many more. When you go on group hikes organize an impromptu stretch session at the start and end of every hike with your fellow walkers.

Resources

Pierce, Mark, ATC, and David Musnick, MD. *Conditioning For Outdoor Fitness: Functional Exercise & Nutrition for Every Body, 2nd Edition*. Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2004.

Plotkin, Stuart. *The Hiking Engine: Guide to the Care and Maintenance of Feet and Legs*. Birmingham: Menasha Ridge Press, 2001.

American Hiking Society Fact Sheet, "Step To It":
www.AmericanHiking.org/news/fact.html.

Fact Sheet