

Stretching Regimen

Pelvic Floor Squat

Focus – Pelvic Floor



This stretch is one of the few that actually can target the pelvic floor. Starting with legs just outside shoulder-width apart, toes pointed slightly outward, squat down until you are just a few inches above the floor. Don't give in to the temptation to stop this stretch halfway down; your pelvic floor won't benefit if you don't get to the final position. It may be advisable to do this stretch with your back to a wall for additional support. Once in the stretch, practice deep breathing and hold for at least 60 seconds. You can use your elbows to spread your knees open, deepening the stretch. Consciously relax the pelvic floor – some people describe this as feeling the pelvic floor 'drop', the sitbones spreading, or the sense of relief as you first start to urinate.

Happy Baby

Focus – Pelvic Floor



Another stretch that targets the pelvic floor, Happy Baby is a yoga position that can be done on your back. In this position, grab the legs (at the feet, ankles, or calves) and gently pull back towards your chest. Your feet should be close together, with your knees flared wide. Keep your back flat on the floor and head on the ground. Just like with the squat stretch above, breathe deeply in this position for at least 60 seconds and use the elbows to spread the legs to deepen the stretch. You should also focus on 'dropping' the pelvic floor in this stretch, and feeling it relax. Make sure your abdominal muscles are relaxed. During the stretch, note how your pelvic floor feels; you may even notice an immediate change or relief in symptoms with this stretch.

Chair Stretch

Focus – Hamstrings and Inner Thighs



This stretch targets both the hamstrings and inner thighs. Standing approximately 2-3 feet from a surface, lean over. Start with your feet a little wider than shoulder-width apart. Keeping your back and knees straight, concentrate on lifting the tailbone towards the sky. You should feel a stretch in the backs of your legs. Hold this position, with your legs straight, for 60 seconds.

Without moving your feet or arms, slightly bend one knee while keeping the pelvis back. Leaning slightly in the direction of your bent leg, you should quickly feel a stretch running down the inner thigh of your straight leg. Hold this for 60 seconds and then switch legs.

Stretching Tips

1. **All Gain, No Pain** – Stretching shouldn't hurt. If you do feel pain, ease backwards until it is comfortable again. You should never feel any numbness or tingling.
2. **Relax into Stretches** – You should be holding each stretch for at least 60 seconds, feeling the body start to relax into the stretch.
3. **Deep Breathing** – This is a great chance to practice deep breathing, helping the body to relax and deepening the stretches.

Butterfly Stretch

Focus – Inner Thighs



Start by lying on your back with your knees raised and pointed to the ceiling, feet on the floor. Slowly let your knees fall outward. You should feel a stretch in your supper inner thighs in this position. If this is difficult or painful, you can slide a pillow under your legs to help support their weight, or start with one leg at a time. As always, continue to work on deep breathing and relaxation during this stretch.

You can also do the stretch sitting up, with the soles of your feet pressed together, arms resting on your legs to help deepen the stretch. This can be a great position if you're doing something else at the same time (reading, watching TV), but it makes deep breathing a little more challenging, so we generally recommend the version on your back.

Mini-Lunge Stretch

Focus – Hip Flexors (Front of the Thigh)



Take a step forward, about 50% longer than your normal stride. Your feet should be flat on the floor and facing forward. Fighting the tendency of the body to twist, align your pelvis with your front leg so your torso is aimed directly over your leading foot; you may already feel a stretch in your back leg in this position. If you're able, gradually bend your front knee and enhance the stretch, which you should be feeling in your upper inner thigh, right near your groin. Hold this stretch for at least 60 seconds, then switch legs. You may also feel a stretch in the calves.

Cobra Stretch

Focus – Abdominal Muscles



This stretch focuses on the abdominal muscles. With the tops of your feet of the floor and hands shoulder-width apart, gently straighten your arms in order to arch your back. Keep your pelvis glued to the ground. You can hold the stretch here for at least 60 seconds while breathing deeply. If you're unable to hold yourself up with your arms or have back pain with the full stretch, you can put your elbows and forearms on the ground in order to raise yourself up.

Figure '4' Stretch

Focus – Piriformis (Glutes)



Start on your back, feet flat on the flour and knees bent. Place your right ankle on the front of your left knee, creating a keyhole (or the open part of the number '4'). You may feel a stretch already in your right glute muscles, stretching from your sit bone towards the outside of your hip. If you are able, reach both hands forward. Clasp them behind your left knee and gently pull it back towards you, enhancing the stretch. Hold this for at least 60 seconds and then switch legs.

If you can't tolerate this stretch you can modify the exercise. From the same starting position, simply reach forward and pull your knee straight back to your chest. This doesn't get exactly the same muscles as the Figure 4 stretch, so graduate to the full stretch when able.