Guidelines for Developing Flexibility

What is the most efficient method to follow when attempting to implement a program to increase FLEXIBILITY? It is extremely simple. There are four basic rules to follow and these rules apply to every stretch. The only task left to accomplish is to learn the alignment positions for each muscle.

**Rule One.**
**STRETCH TO THE POINT OF COMFORTABLE TENSION.**
Nothing should hurt there should be no pain involved. If it hurts while you are stretching or when you release the stretch then you have pushed too far. Stretching should be easy and relaxed.

**Rule Two.**
Once you find the point of comfortable tension, HOLD THE POSITION. DO NOT BOUNCE. This is called static stretching and it is the best method for developing your flexibility. Bouncing or bobbing (dynamic stretching) can overstretc h the muscle tendon causing the muscle fibers to contract against the tension and worse yet, individual muscle fibers can be torn and damaged. This sets off a natural response of pain and spasm which can lead to a decrease in muscle flexibility. Static stretching, on the other hand, actually promotes relaxation. As the fibers relax, the connective tissue is more effectively stretched.

**Rule Three.**
Once the point of tension is reached, HOLD THE POSITION FOR TEN SECONDS. RELEASE AND REPEAT SIX TO EIGHT TIMES. Each time you release the position, the muscle fibers relax a little more allowing the muscle to stretch farther once the position is resumed. Holding the stretch for more than ten seconds can set off a nervous system response that will cause the muscle fibers to contract.

**Rule Four.**
The keys to developing flexibility are FREQUENCY AND CONSISTENCY. You cannot stretch too often if done correctly. Daily exercises are required to develop the change in flexibility.
• Stretching Quick Reference Sheet •

1. Cat Arch
2. Modified Cat Arch
3. Pelvic Tilt
4. Pelvic Rotation
5. Modified Pelvic Rotation
6. Lateral Wall Stretch
7. Adductor/Groin
8. Hip Flexor
9. Calf Stretch
10. Achilles Stretch
11. Hamstring
12. Z-Sit Stretch
13. Standing Chest Stretch
14. Standing Lat Stretch
15. Wall Alignment
16. Seated Side Bend
17. Spinal Twist
• Cat Arch •

Position (Illustration 1-1):
- Position yourself on your hands and knees, placing your hands directly under your shoulders, and your knees directly under your hips.
- Turn your hands inward, with your fingers pointing toward each other.

The Stretch (Illustration 1-2):
- Drop your head, bringing your chin toward your chest.
- Arch your back, pulling your buttocks inward and toward the floor, thereby arching your back upward, toward the ceiling.

Key Points (Illustration 1-3):
* You should feel the stretch along the upper part of your back, around and between your shoulder blades.
- Don’t move your hands.
- Don’t forget to keep your head dropped, with your chin toward your chest.
- Your buttocks should be pulled under your back.
**Stretching Exercises**

**• Modified Cat Arch •**

**Position (Illustration 2-1):**
- On your hands and knees, place your hands on the floor stretched out in front of your body.
- Place your hands shoulder-width apart, and parallel to each other.

**The Stretch (Illustration 2-2):**
- Keeping your arms extended, and your head down, lower your buttocks to your heels.

**Key Points (Illustration 2-3):**
- You should feel the stretch along the upper and middle parts of your back, along your spine and around your shoulder blades.
- Do not slide or move your hands in any way.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Pelvic Tilt •

Position (Illustration 3-1):
• Lay down on the floor with your legs bent.
• Place a folded towel under your tail bone, where your back meets your buttocks.
• Cross your arms, and place them over your chest.
• Your feet, shoulders, and head should all be flat on the floor.

The Stretch (Illustration 3-2):
• Using your stomach muscles, pull your pelvis down toward the floor, trying to flatten of your lower back against the floor.

Key Points (Illustration 3-3):
* You should feel the stretch in your lower back.
• Do not push with your legs.
• Use your stomach muscles to pull in and down.
• Think of it as trying to touch your belly button to your backbone.
• Pelvic Rotation •

Position (Illustration 4-1):
• Lay down on the floor with your legs bent, and with your feet and shoulders flat on the floor.
• For balance, place your arms at your sides with your palms down.

The Stretch (Illustration 4-2):
• Keeping your legs bent, your knees together, and both shoulders flat on the floor, rotate your knees to one side.

Key Points (Illustration 4-3):
* You should feel the stretch in the area of your lower back and across your hip.
• Be sure to keep your head and both shoulders flat on the floor.
• Reverse the position to stretch the other side.
**Stretching Exercises**

**• Modified Pelvic Rotation •**

**Position (Illustration 5-1):**
- Lay down on the floor with your legs bent, and with your feet and shoulders flat on the floor.
- For balance, place your arms at your sides with your palms down.

**The Stretch (Illustration 5-2):**
- Keeping your legs bent, your knees together, and both shoulders flat on the floor, rotate your knees to one side.
- Take the leg that is closest to the floor and cross it over the top leg. Then, gradually pull the top leg toward the floor. (Illustration 5-3)

**Key Points (Illustration 5:4):**
- You should feel the stretch in your lower back and across your hip.
- Be sure to keep your head and both shoulders flat on the floor.
- Reverse the position to stretch the other side.
• Lateral Wall Stretch •

Position (Illustrations 6-1 and 6-2):
- Stand about two feet from a wall.
- Extend your arm horizontally and place your hand on the wall.
- Cross your legs, placing the leg that is farthest from the wall in front of the other leg.
- Both feet should be pointed straight ahead, and as flat on the floor as possible.

The Stretch (Illustration 6-3):
- Place the free hand on the hip that is farthest from the wall.
- Lean your hips toward the wall while moving your upper torso away from the wall.

Key Points (Illustration 6-4):
- You should feel the stretch in the outer hip area that is closest to the wall.
- Don’t rotate your hips or shoulders during the exercise. Keep your body facing forward (Illustration 6-5).
- Change positions so that you may stretch the other side in the same manner.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Adductor/Groin •

Position (Illustration 7-1):
- Sit with your back flat against a wall.
- Put the soles of your feet together and bend your legs.
- Your heels should be 12-14 inches away from your body.

The Stretch (Illustration 7-2):
- Slowly push your knees toward the floor.

Key Points (Illustration 7-3):
- You should feel the stretch on the inside of your thighs.
- Be sure to keep your back flat against the wall.
- Don’t bounce your knees.


• Stretching Exercises •

• Hip Flexor •

Position:
• Stand near a wall.
• Extend your arm and place your hand or forearm on the wall for support.

The Stretch (Illustrations 8-1 and 8-2):
• Bend the leg that is farthest from the wall.
• Using your free hand, hold the foot of the bent leg.
• Without leaning forward, pull the knee of the bent leg backward.

Key Points (Illustration 8-3):
• You should feel the stretch in the front of the thigh of the bent leg.
• Don’t hyperextend your lower back.
• Keep the bent leg parallel to the leg on which you are standing.
• Change positions so that you may stretch the other leg in the same manner.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Calf Stretch •

Position (Illustration 9-1):
• Stand, facing a wall.
• Extend your arms and place your hands on the wall for support.
• Place your feet in a straddle position with one foot forward and the other back.
• Place your feet about shoulder-width apart, and point your feet straight ahead.

The Stretch (Illustration 9-2):
• Lean forward, keeping your back leg straight.
• Keep both heels flat on the floor.

Key Points (Illustration 9-3):
* You should feel the stretch in your mid- and upper calf.
• Keep both heels flat on the floor, with both feet pointed straight ahead.
• Keep your back leg straight at all times.
• Change positions so that you may stretch the other leg in the same manner.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Achilles Stretch •

Position (Illustration 10-1):
- Stand, facing a wall.
- Extend your arms and place your hands on the wall for support.
- Place your feet in a straddle position with one foot forward and the other back.
- Place your feet about shoulder-width apart, and point your feet straight ahead.

The Stretch (Illustration 10-2):
- Shift your weight onto the back leg.
- Bend your back leg by moving your knee forward, keeping both heels flat on the floor.

Key Points (Illustration 10-3):
- You should feel the stretch in the back leg, along the lower part of your calf to just above the heel.
- Keep both heels flat on the floor, with both feet pointed straight ahead.
- Change positions so that you may stretch the other leg in the same manner.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Hamstring •

Position (Illustration 11-1):
• Sit on the floor with both legs extended straight out in front of you.
• Bend one leg inward so the sole of the foot on the bent leg is placed against the lower part of the straight leg.
• Keep the foot of the straight leg up, with your toes pointing toward the ceiling.
• Extend both arms forward, placing your hands flat on the floor or on the straightened leg.

The Stretch (Illustration 11-2):
• Lean forward over the straightened leg.

Key Points (Illustration 11-3):
• You should feel the stretch in the hamstring muscles, and possibly into the upper calf.
• When stretching, keep your back straight and your head up.
• Do not pull on your lower leg or toes.
• Change positions so that you may stretch the other leg in the same manner.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Z – Sit •

Position (Illustration 12-1):
- Sit on the floor with one leg back and the other forward.
- Bend your back leg to about a 45-degree angle.
- Bend your front leg to no more than a 90-degree angle.
- Place one hand on each side of your front leg.

The Stretch (Illustration 12-2):
- Keeping your back straight, lean forward in a direct line over your front leg.

Key Points (Illustration 12-3):
- You should feel the stretch in your buttocks, and in your front leg.
- Keep your back straight.
- When stretching, your chest should be out over the knee of your front leg.
- Switch position to stretch the other leg.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Standing Chest Stretch •

Position (Illustration 13-1):
• Stand in the opening of a doorway.
• Place your arm on the wall, making a 90-degree angle with your upper and forearm.
• Place your feet in a straddle position, with one foot forward and the other back.

The Stretch (Illustration 13-2):
• Place weight on your front leg by leaning forward, in the direction of the doorway opening.

Key Points (Illustration 13-3):
* You should feel the stretch across your chest and up into the shoulder of the arm against the wall.
• Keep your arm in the horizontal/90-degree position at all times.
• Reverse the position to stretch the other side.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Standing Lat •

Position (Illustration 14-1):
• Stand in the opening of a doorway.
• Bend your arm, bring it upward, and place your elbow on the wall.
• Place your feet in a straddle position with one foot forward and the other back.

The Stretch (Illustration 14-2):
• Place weight on your front leg by leaning forward into the doorway or wall.
• Shifting your weight will reposition your upper arm near or past your ear.

Key Points (Illustration 14-3):
• You should feel the stretch along the back portion of your upper arm, and into the side of your upper back (This is known as the latissimus dorsi, or "lat" for short).
• Your hand should remain above your elbow and over your shoulder at all times.
• Reverse the position to stretch the other side.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Wall Alignment •

Position (Illustration 15-1):
• Sit with your back against a wall, and with your legs out in front of you and flat against the floor.
• Place your back, shoulders, elbows, hands, and head flat against the wall.
• Place the backs of your hands flat against the wall, making 90-degree angles with your arms.

The Stretch (Illustration 15-2):
• Keeping your legs straight and your back flat at all times, gradually extend your arms up the wall.

Key Points (Illustrations 15-3 and 15-4):
* You should feel the stretch in your back, between your shoulder blades, and in the front of your shoulders.
• Be sure to keep your back, shoulders, arms, and hands flat against the wall. If you can't do this, then don't extend your arms up the wall until you can.
• Do not hold your breath.

Illustration 15-1

Illustration 15-2

Illustration 15-3

Illustration 15-4
• Stretching Exercises •

• Seated Side Bend •

**Position (Illustration 16-1):**
- Sit against a wall, with your legs apart, and with your back flat against the wall.

**The Stretch (Illustration 16-2):**
- Place one hand on the floor close to the wall, while keeping the other beside or on top of your head.
- Keeping your back, shoulders, elbows, and head flat against the wall, bend toward the side where your hand is on the floor.

**Key Points (Illustration 16-3):**
- You should feel the stretch along the side of your torso.
- Do not lean forward.
- Keep your back, shoulders, elbows, and head flat against the wall at all times.
- Reverse the position to stretch the other side.
• Stretching Exercises •

• Spinal Twist •

Position (Illustration 17-1):
• Sit on the floor with your back straight and your legs out in front of you.
• Bend one leg and cross it over the other leg, placing the foot of the bent leg flat on the floor.
• Place the hand opposite the straight leg behind you for balance.

The Stretch (Illustration 17-2):
• Using the elbow of your free arm, cross it over the bent leg, and push the leg across your body and backward.
• Twist your torso toward the bent leg.

Key Points (Illustration 17-3):
• You should feel the stretch across the hip of your bent leg.
• Always twist your torso toward the bent leg.
• Use your elbow to push against your knee, and always keep your back straight.
• Change positions so that you may stretch the other leg in the same manner.