

stretch your potential


Do your muscles a favour and stretch after each workout. **Martha Lourey-Bird** shows you how.

Stretching is a vital part of any workout. If you aren't including stretching in your fitness plan, then it is incomplete.

You should only stretch when your muscles are warm, just as you've finished your workout. You don't need to be sweating or huffing and puffing though. Stretching while warm prevents injury, improves posture, and prevents soreness. You shouldn't stretch after being idle as your muscles are cold and this can cause damage.

The types of stretches you should be doing are called static stretches. That's where you hold each stretch for 10 to 30 seconds, holding each position until you feel some resistance. You should stretch all major muscles during a stretch session. Since stretching is relaxing and a good stress release, it is a nice way to wind down after a workout.

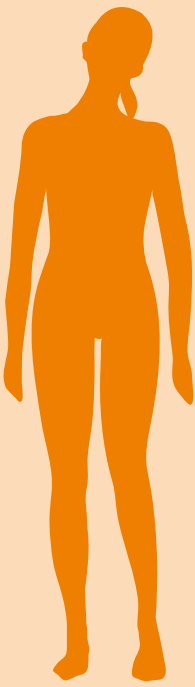
Five essential stretches:



Abductor

Stretch area: outer thigh and bottom


Sit upright with your legs straight out in front of you. Then bend one knee and keep the other leg straight. Cross the bent leg over the straight leg and pull it towards you. You should feel the stretch in the outer thigh and bottom of the bent leg. To increase the stretch, pull the bent leg in closer to your chest. Swap sides and repeat with the other leg.



Ear-to-shoulder

Stretch area: neck

Standing tall, gently drop your right ear towards your right shoulder. You should feel a stretch down the left side of your neck – the side that is lengthened. Ensure both shoulders are level at all times. Swap sides and repeat.



Half cobra

Stretch area: stomach

Lie on your front with your palms face down beside your head, fingers forward, and keep your forearms in a straight line on the floor. Raise your chest up, keeping your elbows, hips and bellybutton on the floor and your chin tucked in to your chest.

● Stretching tips

- Stretching should never be painful. If you feel pain, stop.
- Never bounce or overstretch.
- Breathe normally and don't hold your breath.

Hug



Stretch area: lower back and bottom

Lie on your back and bring your knees to your chest. Hug your shins or the back of your thighs. Keep your entire back, head and shoulders touching the floor during the stretch.

Pectoral



Stretch area: chest

Clasp your hands behind your back and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Adjust the height of your arm so that you feel a comfortable stretch across your chest and the front of your shoulders.

tailored to fit

Fitness editor **Martha Lourey-Bird** creates an introductory recovery exercise program for Chris Majoroff, who is just getting back into exercise.

Obstacles

Chris's biggest obstacles are the injuries sustained in a car accident in 2002, which still require physiotherapy and give her joint pain in the spine, hip, knee and shoulder areas.

Goals

- Reduce joint pain
- To get fitter and lose 3kg
- To tone up all over, especially her tummy
- Make use of her home gym



Chris Majoroff, 52

Solutions

Anyone with a pre-existing medical condition, joint pain or injuries should get approval from their doctor and/or specialist before starting regular exercise, particularly if they have not exercised for some time. Once you get the all-clear, it's best to start gradually. As Chris is not currently doing regular exercise, the following is a beginners program to get her into moving again.

Cardio

Chris has two different walks she enjoys doing – one takes 50 minutes while the other is 35 minutes. She should walk at a pace that makes her puffed and sweat a little, but always keep on flat terrain to avoid anything that gives her any pain.

Resistance

Chris has a home gym and some light hand weights. She can consult her specialists and get a physio-approved resistance training program that she can do following her shorter walk two days each week. The program should include suitable exercises for her whole body, including strengthening her core.

Own choice

For variety, Chris can choose her favourite exercise to do on a Sunday. This might be anything something in the pool, a walk, some light gardening or an exercise DVD. **www**

Fitness update

Last month Martha created a fitness plan for Barbra Williams. Barbra says: "I've really enjoyed trying out my new exercise plan. I've had fun organising activities to do with the family on weekends and we have tried some new things like bush dancing."

- **Monday**
Short walk and resistance session
- Tuesday**
Long walk
- Wednesday**
Day off
- Thursday**
Short walk and resistance session
- Friday**
Long walk
- Saturday**
Day off
- Sunday**
Own choice