

10 GREAT STRETCHES for ACTIVE AGING!!

“Ready? Here we go...from head to toe”

To begin...understand that a static stretch (one that is held) must be held for at least 20 seconds in order to be effective. Longer is alright, but shoot for at least 20 seconds. A dynamic stretch (one that is moving) must be done slowly and smoothly. BOTH require a breathing pattern that is relaxed and even.

1. Neck:

- *Rotation* (turn the head to the right and hold...then left and hold...repeat several times)
- *Lateral flexion* (right ear to the right & hold...then left and hold...repeat several times)
- *Forward flexion* (chin down & hold...then sweep it back and forth across the chest...repeat)
- **NOTE: DO NOT** take the head back / no full circles.

2. Chest:

- *Wings of a bird:* Take the hands behind the back and clasp one wrist (arms like wings). Open the arms/wings as far as possible, keeping the head above your shoulders (avoid jutting the chin forward).

3. Shoulders:

- *Back stroke.*
Alternating...long arm reaches forward, up & back.
- *Rainbows:* Standing sideways to a wall, extend the arm against the wall with the entire arm, shoulder-to-palm, in contact. Exhale the arm/palm up the wall and inhale back to the starting point.

4. Elbows: From the elbow, bend & straighten the arm repeatedly.

5. Wrists: Rotate in both directions, making sure to rotate from the joint.

6. Hands:

- *Fist and fling:* Reach fingers open wide...make a fist...repeat, repeat.
- *Finger circles:* Ends of the fingers touching (fingers of R hand touching the tips of the fingers of the L hand). Make circles w/ thumbs...then with the index fingers...then the middle fingers...etc.

7. Spine: (sit up tall and keep the shoulders level for best results)

- *Rotation:* Lay the left hand on the right leg, and grab the frame of the chair behind with the right hand. The shoulders should be parallel to the floor / level, turning only as far as comfort allows and hold 20 seconds or more.
- *Lateral flexion:* Drop the right arm down by the side. Reaching down with the fingertips of the R hand, reach straight up with the fingertips of the L hand. Drop the R side of the ribcage and lift the L side of the ribcage. Do the same to the opposite side, holding each

for at least 20 seconds. If shoulder pain is an issue, leave the hands on the lap and bend the torso. NOTE: Bend as far as comfort allows.

- Forward flexion & rear extension: With both feet planted on the floor shoulder width apart, put the hands on the lap and drop the chin toward the chest. Slightly round the middle of the back toward the chair, flexing vertebrae open. Hold for 20 seconds or more. Slowly sit back up and repeat #2 for balance.

8. Quads (thighs):

- Turn to the right in a chair that has no arms. Drop the left knee straight down toward the floor (head up) & focus on the stretch in front of the left leg. Turn and repeat on the opposite side.

8. Hamstrings (back of the leg) & calves:

- Sit on the front edge of the chair. Extend the R leg and flex the toes up toward the ceiling. Drop the chest forward. Feel the stretch up the back of the extended leg and into the hip; no back pain.

9. Ankles:

- Ankle slowly rotates, as if to trace the face of a clock. Go clockwise with the R foot and counter-clockwise with the L foot.
- Point the toes away...flex the toes towards the chin...repeat several.

10. Toes/Feet:

- *The crawl:* With no shoes on, sit in a chair with feet flat on the floor. Pull with the toes of both feet, crawling away. Slide the feet back into place, crawl away again. Repeat several times.
- Draw the entire alphabet, or draw the names of family members, with your right foot. Repeat with the left foot.
 - Brain/ankle exercise: Try writing the alphabet backwards.

If time is an issue, do the stretches you are feel are most needed for YOU on any given day. This will serve to increase the flexibility of your joints, thereby increasing your level of mobility! Additional benefits of performing **daily** stretches:

- Helps to prevent arthritis, and often serves to lessen the pain for those who have it.
- Serves to increase balance and stability.
- Is often the best treatment for muscle cramps.
- Improves posture and alignment.
- Enhances development of strength.
- Creates the relaxation response.
 - Slows the breathing rate, reduces mental stress and blood pressure.

- ❖ Research has shown falls among the senior population are often due to low levels of mobility, compromising the ability to balance. Reduced mobility is often a direct result of reduced levels of flexibility.

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