

Stretching^{3,4}

Walking is one of the best activities you can do to improve your physical well-being. To ensure that you get the most benefit from your walking program be sure to include a light warm-up, stretching and a cool-down.

Warm up and Stretching

Warming up is an easy way to prepare your body for exercise and reduces the chance of injury. Stretching is included in the warm-up, BUT should only be done after you have warmed up your body. You should never stretch a cold muscle as this could easily lead to injury. Stretching is a good way to improve muscle flexibility, optimize joint mobility and help relieve tension and stress.

For your walking program, start out walking at a slower pace until you start to feel warm (this should be about 10-minutes), then take a few minutes to do the following stretches.

Calves

1. Stand in a stride or walking position with one leg straight behind you (DON'T LOCK YOUR KNEE) and the other leg bent in front of you. Take support from a wall or a chair.
2. Lean your body forwards until you feel a stretch in your calf. Hold for at least 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times for each leg.



Hamstrings

1. Lift your leg onto a chair and keep your knee straight. (DON'T LOCK YOUR KNEE).
2. Lean forward at your hips, keeping your back straight until you feel a stretch in the back of your thigh. Hold for at least 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times for each leg.

Quads

1. Stand holding onto a support with one hand and to your ankle with the other hand.



2. Keeping your back straight, pull your ankle towards your bottom until you feel a stretch on the front of your thigh. Hold for at least 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times for each leg.

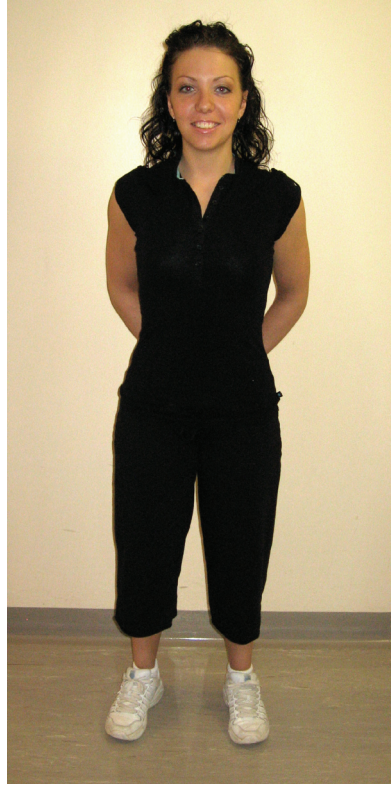
Hip Flexor

1. Stand in a lunge position. Put both your hands on the knee in front of you and keep the back leg straight. (DON'T LOCK YOUR KNEE).
2. Keeping your back straight, push your hips forward until you feel stretch in the front of the hip and thigh of the straight leg. Hold for at least 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times for each leg.



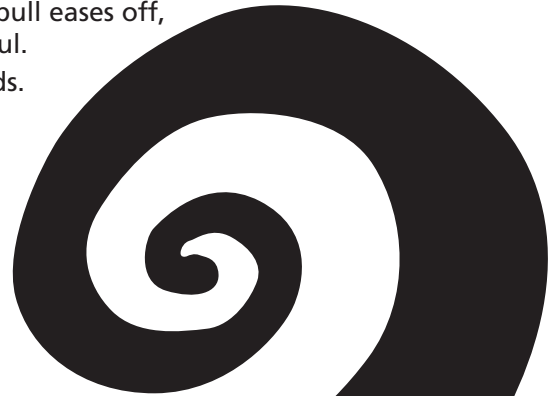
Upper Body

1. Stand with the backs of your hands resting on your bottom.
2. Pull back your shoulders, bringing your shoulder blades together until you feel a stretch through your chest. Hold for at least 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.



What you need to know about stretching:

1. You should feel a gentle pull in the muscle when stretching. If the pull eases off, stretch a little further into the range, but it should NEVER be painful.
2. Once you feel a gentle pull, hold this position for at least 30 seconds. **DO NOT BOUNCE!**
3. Repeat each stretch 3 times.
4. Once you are done stretching, continue on with your walking program. On longer walks, it may be beneficial to also stretch at the mid-point of your walk.



Cool-down

Cooling your body down after exercise is important as it helps your body remove muscle waste products and reduces muscle stiffness and soreness.

Your cool-down should include 5-10 minutes of walking at a slower pace and the stretches you did as a warm-up. If you experience any pain, muscle strain or other problems limiting your mobility, go see your local physiotherapist!

See www.physiotherapy.ca and the CDHA physiotherapy intranet site <http://cdhaintra.cdha.nshealth.ca/departmentservices/physiotherapy/index.html> or email at physiotherapy@cdha.nshealth.ca

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Walking Tips

- 1. Arms:** During your warm-up and cool down, your arms should be relaxed and loose at your sides and you should let them gently swing their full length in time with your stride. To increase the intensity of your workout, swing your arms more quickly or with arms at a 90-degree angle.
- 2. Legs:** take comfortable strides....too long a stride can lead to muscle strain and early muscle fatigue.
- 3. Pace Yourself!** Start slowly if you are just beginning to exercise again and gradually progress yourself. Each day, try to increase the distance, time or intensity of your walk until you reach your own personal goal.
- 4. Posture:** Make sure you are walking with good posture. Try to keep your head, shoulders and hips in line with your feet. Leaning forward is a common mistake to avoid as it can lead to back pain.
- 5. Most importantly....HAVE FUN!**
It is a good idea to change your routes about every second day to avoid boredom and over-use injuries. Try walking with a friend or a group, this can provide you with added motivation.

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⁴Canadian Physiotherapy Association, S.M.A.R.T Walking, www.physiotherapy.ca