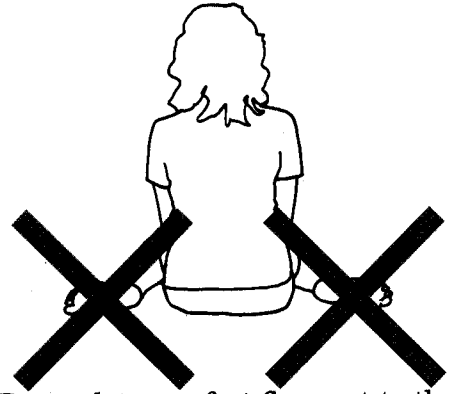


A Series of Stretches for the Legs

Toe Pointer: This is another good stretch for the legs. You can do a series of stretches for the legs, feet, and groin from the toe pointer position.

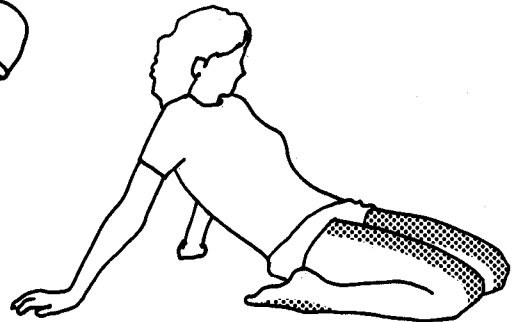
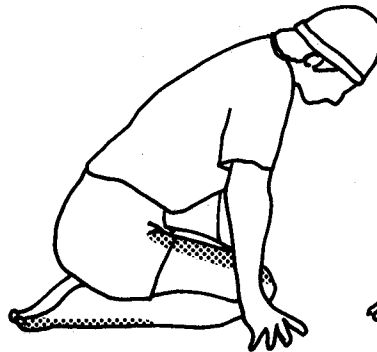
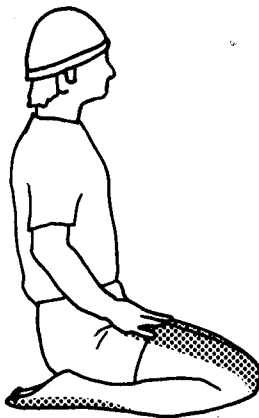


This position helps stretch the knees, ankles, and quadriceps. The toe pointer will also help relax the calves so they may be stretched more easily.



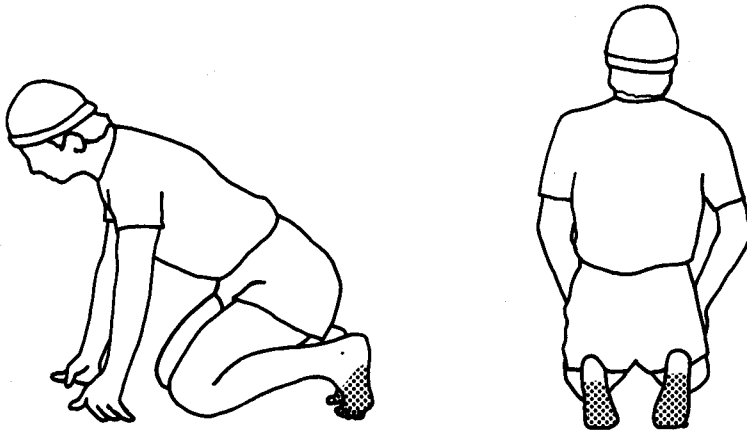
Do not let your feet flare out to the sides when doing this stretch. A flared-out position of the lower legs and feet may cause overstretching of the inside (medial collateral) ligaments of the knee.

Caution: If you have or have had knee problems, be very careful bending the knees underneath you. Do it slowly and under control. If there is any pain, discontinue the stretch.



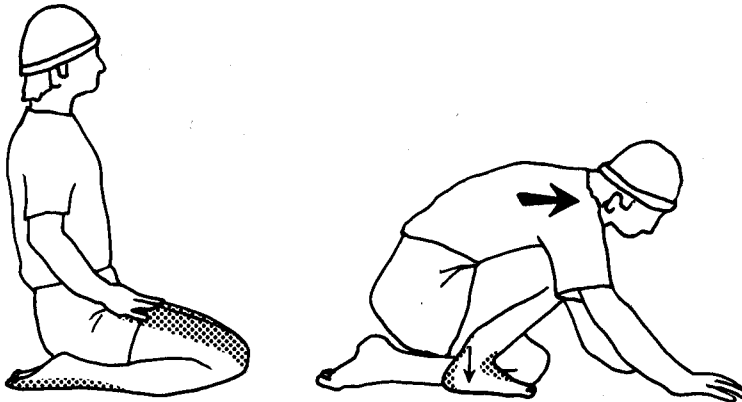
Most women will not feel much of a stretch in this position. But for tight people, especially men, this position lets you know if you have tight ankles. If there is a strain, place your hands on the outside of your legs for support as you balance yourself slightly forward. Find a position you can hold for 20–30 seconds.

If you are tight, do not overstretch. Regularity in stretching creates positive change. There will be noticeable improvement in ankle flexibility within several weeks.



Variation: To stretch your toes and the bottom of your foot (*plantar fascia*), sit with your toes underneath you (*see above*). Put your hands in front of you for balance and control. If you want to stretch further, slowly lean backwards until it feels right. Hold only stretches that feel good and you can control. Stretch easily for 5–10 seconds. Be careful. There may be a lot of tension in this part of the foot and toes. Be patient. Gradually get your body used to changing by stretching regularly. Return to toe pointer after doing this stretch.

To Stretch the Achilles Tendon Area and Ankles

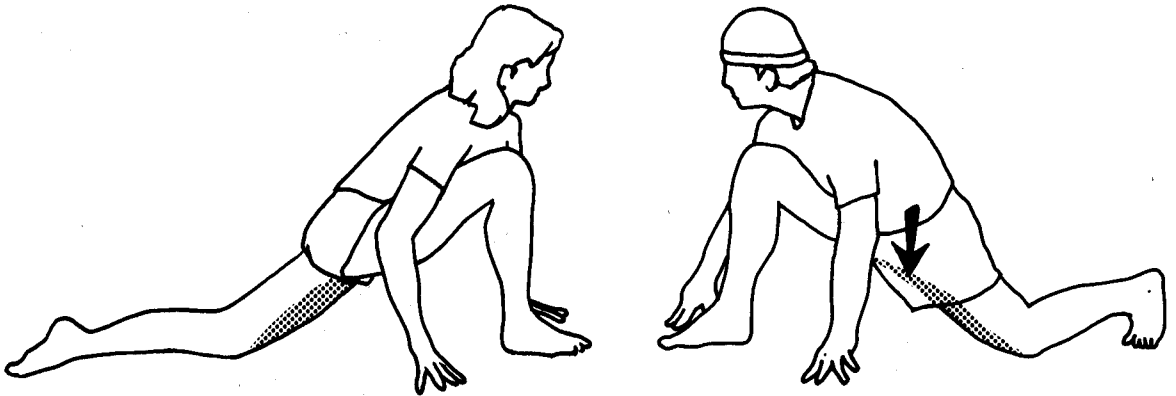


Bring the toes of one foot almost even with or parallel to the knee of the other leg. Let the heel of the bent leg come off the ground one-half inch or so. Lower your heel toward the ground while leaning forward on your thigh (just above the knee) with your chest and shoulder. The idea is not to get the heel flat, but to use the forward pressure from your shoulder on your thigh to gently stretch the Achilles tendon area. Be careful. The Achilles tendon area needs only a *very slight stretch*. Hold for 5–10 seconds.

This stretch is great for tight ankles and arches. Be sure to work both sides. Here again, you will probably find that one side is more flexible than the other.

As we get older or go through periods of inactivity and then are active again, there is a lot of stress and strain on the lower legs, ankles, and arches. One way to reduce or eliminate the pain and soreness of new activity is to stretch before and after exercise.

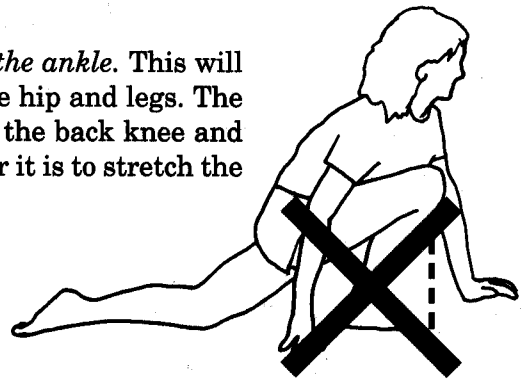
Be careful if you have had knee problems. Do not stretch with any feeling of actual pain. Use control so you find the proper stretch feeling.



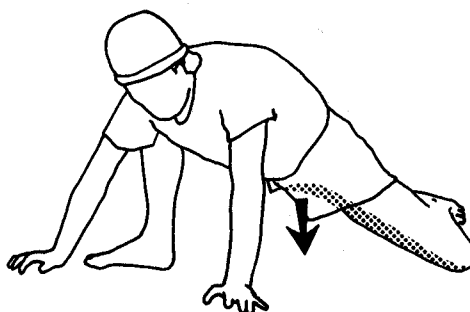
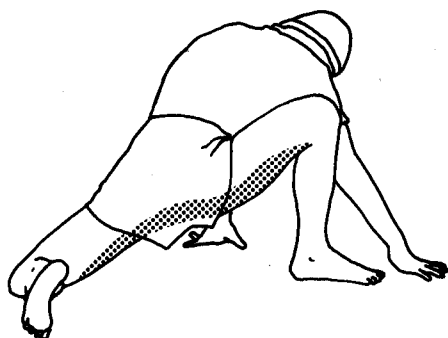
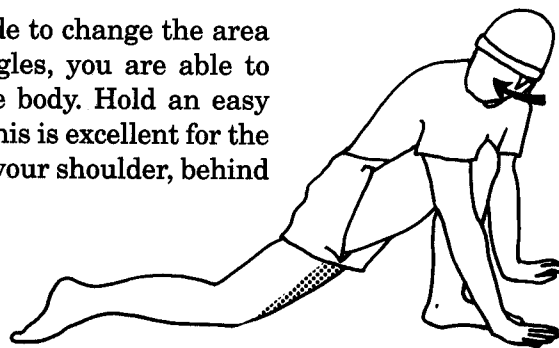
To stretch the muscles in the front of the hip (*iliopsoas*), move one leg forward until the knee of the forward leg is directly over the ankle. Your other knee should be resting on the floor. Now, without changing the position of the knee on the floor or the forward foot, lower the front of your hip downward to create an easy stretch. Hold for 15–20 seconds. You should feel this stretch in the front of the hip and possibly in the hamstrings and groin.

Stretching for 10–20 minutes in the evening is a good way to keep your muscles well tuned, so you feel good the next morning. If you have any tight areas, or soreness, stretch these areas before retiring (or while watching TV) and feel for yourself the difference the next morning.

Do not have your knee forward of the ankle. This will hinder the proper stretching of the hip and legs. The greater distance there is between the back knee and the heel of the front foot, the easier it is to stretch the hips and legs.



Variations: Turn the left hip slowly to the inside to change the area of the stretch. By only slightly changing angles, you are able to stretch many different, adjacent areas of the body. Hold an easy stretch for 10–20 seconds. Stretch both legs. This is excellent for the hips, lower back, and groin. You can look over your shoulder, behind you, to stretch your neck and upper back.



From the previous hip stretch you can isolate a stretch for the inside of the upper leg. Bend your rear knee and move your rear foot to the inside. This will make a 90° angle at the knee joint. Now move your shoulders off your knee and put your hands to the inside of your body for support. Move your hips downward to stretch the inside of your upper leg (groin). Do not move your back knee or front foot. Be sure that your front knee is directly above your ankle. Hold an easy stretch for 10–15 seconds. Try on the other side. Stretch both legs.

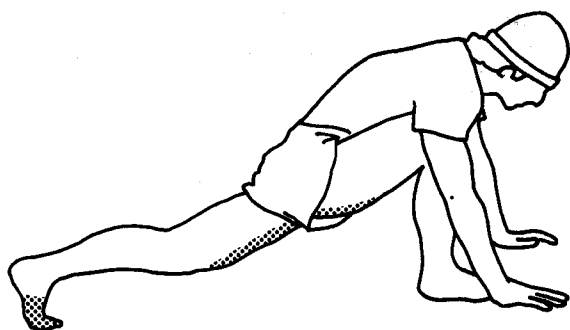


Fig. 1

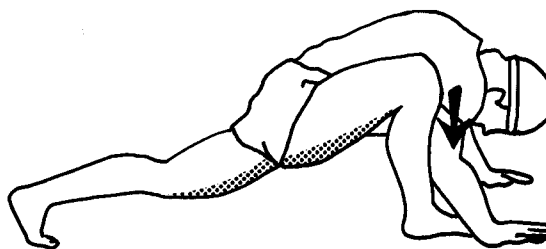
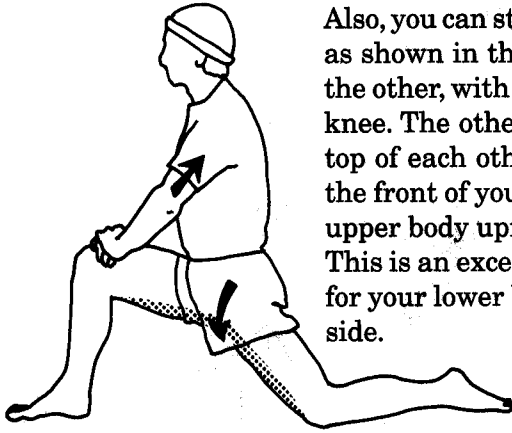


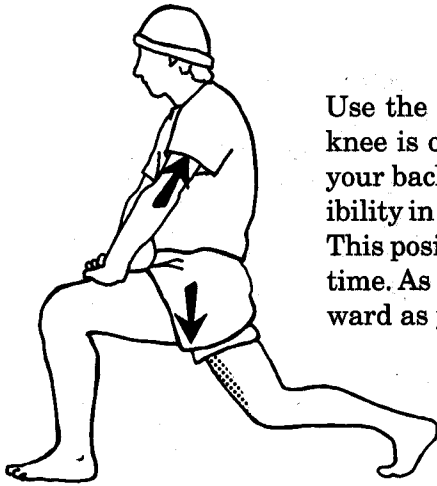
Fig. 2

An excellent stretch for hip flexibility: With your front knee directly above your ankle, shift your weight up onto the toes and ball of your back foot (*fig. 1*). Now hold an easy stretch with a fairly straight back leg for 15–20 seconds. Think of the front of your hip going down to create the right stretch tension. Use your hands for balance. This stretches the groin, hamstrings, and hip, and possibly behind the knee of the back leg. Do both legs.

Another variation is to change the stretch by gently lowering your upper body to the inside of the knee of the forward leg (*fig. 2*). Hold a comfortable stretch for 15–20 seconds.

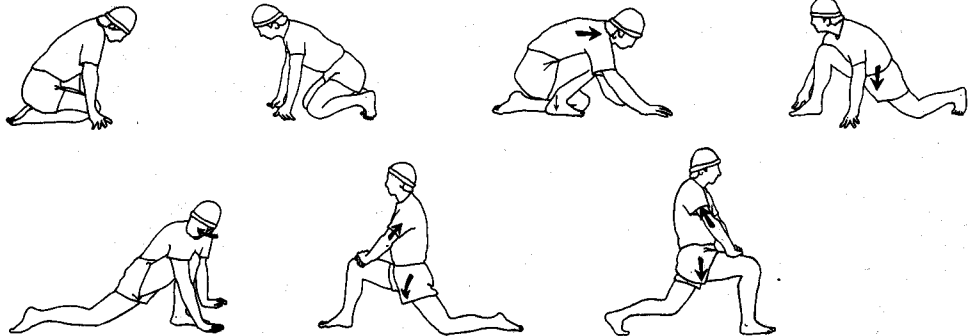


Also, you can stretch your pelvic area with your upper body upright as shown in the next two stretches. Start with one leg in front of the other, with the ankle of your front leg directly below your front knee. The other knee is resting on the floor. Place your hands on top of each other on your thigh, just above your knee. To stretch the front of your hip and thigh, straighten your arms to keep your upper body upright, as you lower the front of your hip downward. This is an excellent stretch for the front of hip (*iliopsoas*) and good for your lower back area. Hold for 10–15 seconds. Repeat for other side.



Use the same technique as in the last stretch, except your back knee is off the floor and you are on the ball of your foot, making your back leg much straighter. This stretch further promotes flexibility in the pelvis/hip area. Hold for 10–15 seconds. Do both sides. This position will challenge you to balance and stretch at the same time. As in the previous stretch, lower the front of your hip downward as you keep your torso upright (vertical).

SUMMARY OF STRETCHES FOR LEGS



Do these leg stretches, in this order, as a routine.
