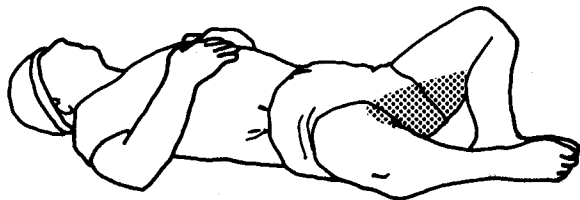


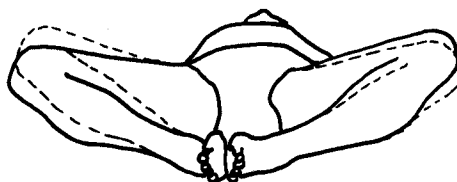
Relaxing Stretches for Your Back

This is a series of very easy stretches that you can do lying on your back. This series is beneficial because each position stretches a body area that is generally hard to relax. You can use this routine for mild stretching and relaxation.



Relax, with knees bent and soles of your feet together. This comfortable position will stretch your groin. Hold for 30 seconds. Let the pull of gravity do the stretching. You may want to put a small pillow behind your head for comfort.

Variation: From this lying groin stretch, gently rock your legs as one unit (see dotted lines) back and forth about 10–12 times. These are real easy movements of no more than one inch in either direction. Initiate movements from top of your hips. This will gently limber up your groin and hips.



A Stretch for the Lower Back, Side, and Top of Hip

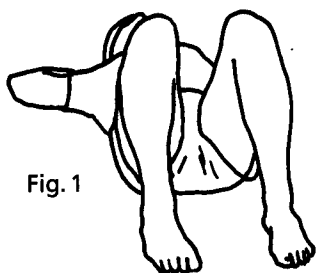


Fig. 1

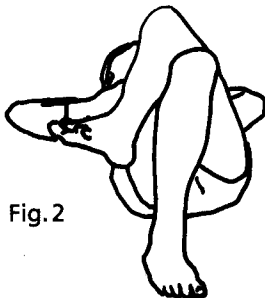


Fig. 2

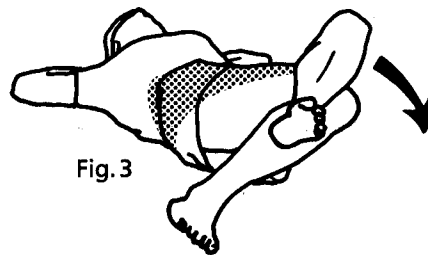


Fig. 3

Bring your knees together and rest your feet on the floor. Interlace your fingers behind your head with your arms on the floor (fig. 1). Now lift the left leg over the right leg (fig. 2). From here, use your left leg to pull your right leg toward the floor (fig. 3) until you feel a good stretch along the side of the hip or in the lower back. Relax. Keep the upper back, back of head, shoulders, and elbows flat on the floor. Hold for 10–20 seconds. *The idea is not to touch the floor with your right knee, but to stretch within your limits.* Repeat the stretch for the other side, crossing the right over the left leg and pulling down to the right. Exhale as you go into the stretch, then breathe rhythmically as you stretch.

- Do not hold your breath.
- Breathe rhythmically.
- Relax.

If you have sciatic* problems of the lower back, this stretch can help. But *be careful*. Hold only stretch tensions that feel good. Never stretch to the point of pain.

PNF Technique: *Contract—Relax—Stretch.* (See pp. 206–209.)

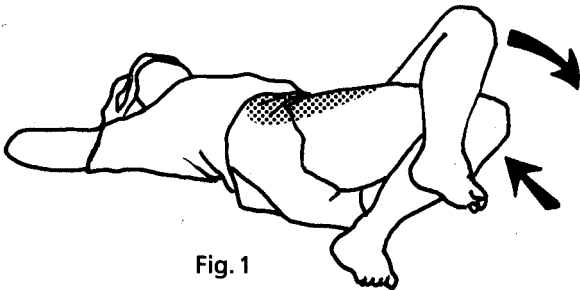


Fig. 1

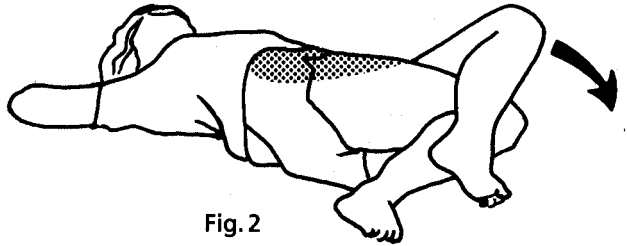
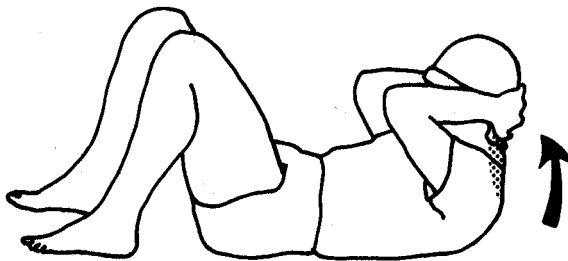
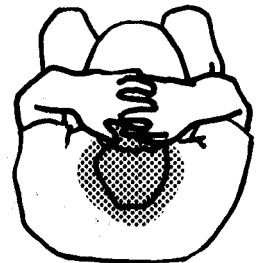


Fig. 2

To do this, hold down the right leg with the left leg, as you try to pull the right leg back to an upright position. This contracts the muscles of the hip area (*fig. 1*). Hold the contraction for 5 seconds, then relax and do the previous stretch (*fig. 2*). This technique is good for people who are tight.

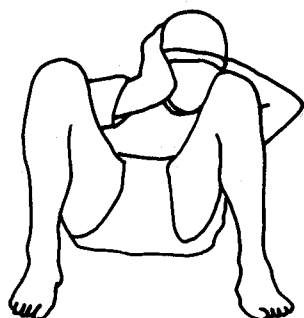
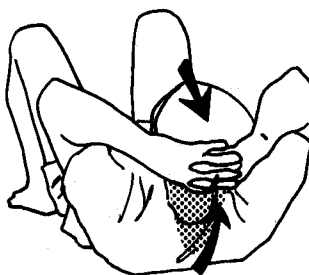


To reduce tension in the neck: While still lying on the floor, you can stretch your upper spine and neck. Interlace your fingers behind your head at about ear level. Slowly pull your head forward until you feel a slight stretch in the back of the neck. Hold for 3–5 seconds, then slowly return to the original starting position. Do this 3–4 times to loosen up the upper spine and neck gradually. Keep your jaw relaxed (back teeth slightly separated) and keep breathing.



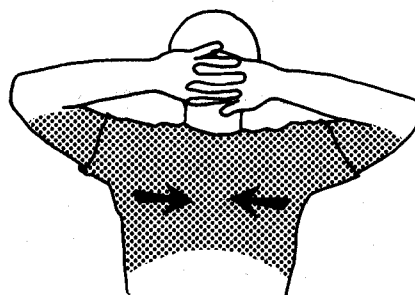
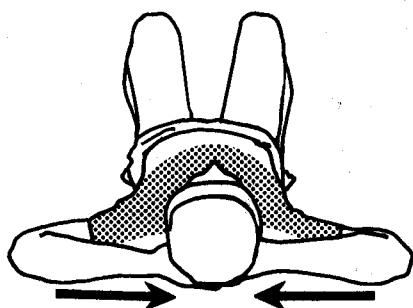
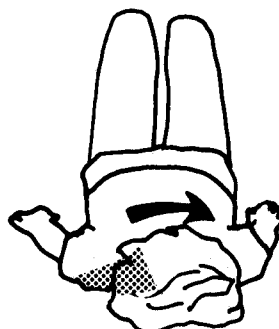
*The sciatic nerve is the longest and largest nerve of the body. It originates in the lumbar portion of the spine (lower back) and travels down the entire length of both legs and out to the great toe.

PNF Technique: Contract—Relax—Stretch. From a bent-knee position, interlace your fingers behind your head (not your neck). Before stretching the back of your neck, gently lift your head upward and forward off the floor. Then move the back of your head downward toward the floor as you resist this movement with your hands and arms. Hold this isometric contraction for 3–4 seconds. Relax for 1–2 seconds, then gently pull your head forward (as in the previous stretch), with your chin going toward your navel until you feel a mild, comfortable stretch. Hold for 3–5 seconds. Do 2–3 times.



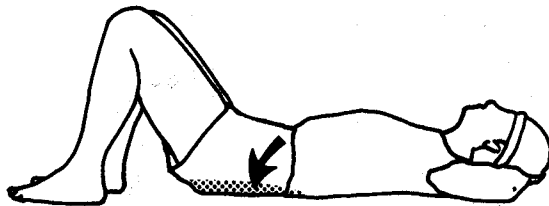
Gently pull your head and chin toward your left knee. Hold for 3–5 seconds. Relax and lower your head back down to the floor, then pull your head gently toward your right knee. Repeat 2–3 times.

With the back of your head on the floor, turn your chin toward your shoulder (as you keep your head resting on the floor). Turn your chin only as far as needed to get an easy stretch in the side of your neck. Hold for 3–5 seconds, then stretch to the other side. Repeat 2–3 times. Keep your jaw relaxed and don't hold your breath.

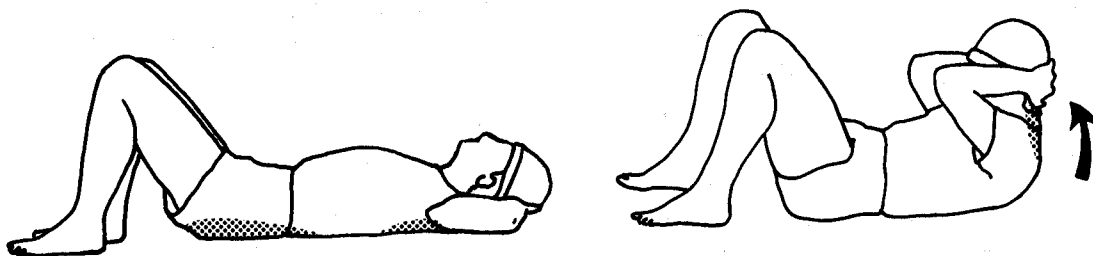


Shoulder Blade Pinch: Interlace your fingers behind your head and pull your shoulder blades together to create tension in the upper back area. (As you do this your chest should move upward.) Hold for 4–5 seconds, then relax and gently pull your head forward as shown on p. 27. This will also release tension in the neck.

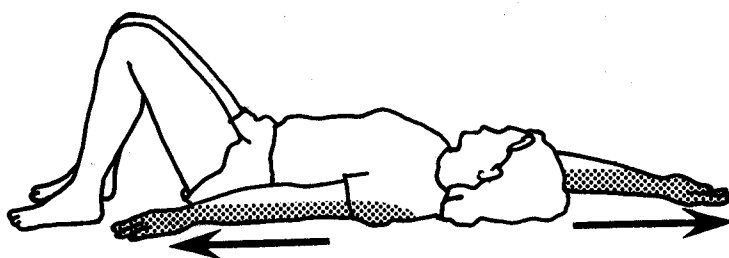
Think of creating tension in the neck and shoulders, relaxing the same area, then stretching the back of the neck to help keep the muscles of the neck free to move without tightness. Repeat 3–4 times.



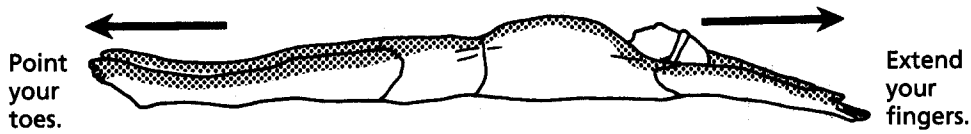
Lower Back Flattener: To relieve tension in your lower back, tighten your butt (*gluteus*) muscles and, at the same time, tighten your abdominal muscles to flatten your lower back. Hold this tension for 5–8 seconds, then relax. Repeat 2–3 times. Concentrate on maintaining constant muscle contraction. This pelvic tilting exercise will strengthen the butt (*gluteus*) and abdominal muscles so that you are able to sit and stand with good posture.



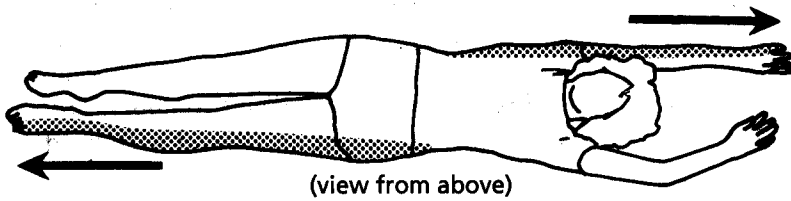
Shoulder Blade Pinch and Gluteus Tightener: Now, simultaneously do the shoulder blade pinch, flatten your lower back, and tighten your butt muscles. Hold contraction for 5 seconds, then relax and pull your head forward to stretch the back of your neck and upper back. Repeat 3–4 times. This feels great.



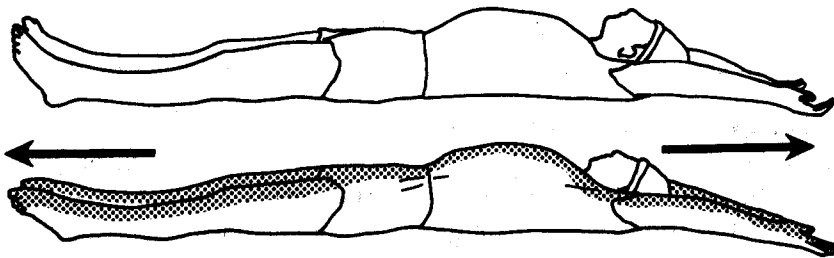
Now put one arm above your head (palm up) and the other arm down along your side (palm down). Reach in opposite directions at the same time to stretch your shoulders and back. Hold stretch for 6–8 seconds. Do both sides at least twice. Keep your lower back relaxed and flat. Keep your jaw relaxed.



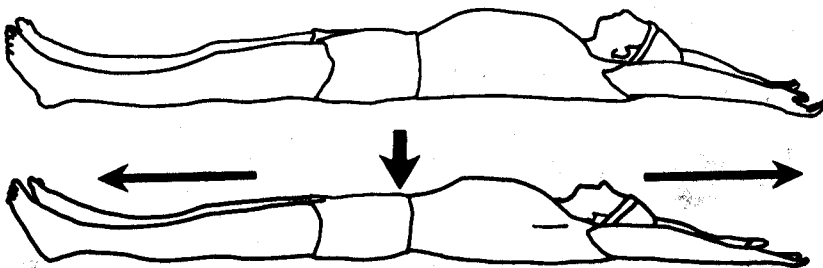
Elongation Stretches: Extend your arms overhead and straighten out your legs. Now reach as far as is comfortable in an opposite direction with your arms and legs. Stretch for 5 seconds, then relax.



Now stretch diagonally. Point the toes of your left foot as you extend your right arm. Stretch as far as is comfortable. Hold for 5 seconds, then relax. Stretch the right leg and the left arm the same way. Hold each stretch for at least 5 seconds, then relax.

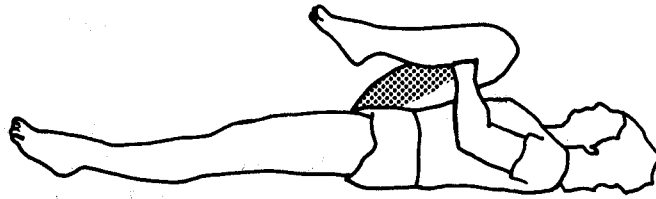


Now, at the same time, stretch both arms and both legs again. Hold for 5 seconds, then relax. This is a good stretch for the muscles of the rib cage, abdominals, spine, shoulders, arms, ankles, and feet.

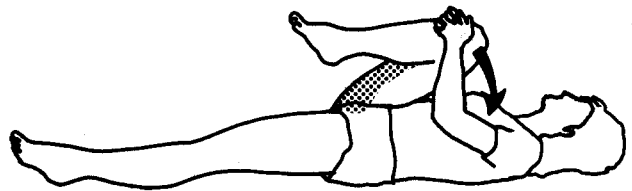


As a variation of this stretch, pull in with the abdominal muscles as you stretch. This will make you feel slim, and is a great exercise for your internal organs.

Doing these elongation stretches three times will reduce tension and tightness and relax your spine and entire body. They help reduce overall body tension quickly. You could do these just before sleeping.

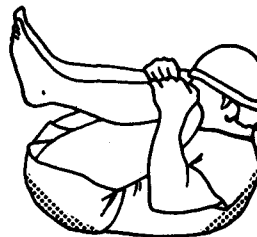
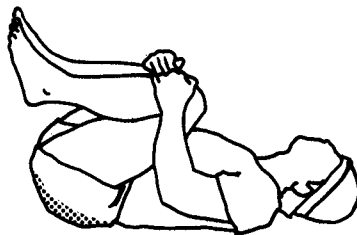
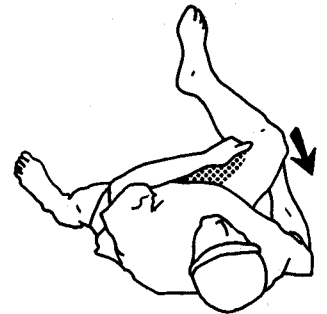


Pull your right leg toward your chest with hands behind the knee. For this stretch keep the back of your head on the floor or mat if possible, but don't strain. Hold an easy stretch for 10–30 seconds. Repeat, pulling your left leg toward your chest. Be sure to keep your lower back flat. If no real stretch is felt, don't worry. If the position feels good, use it. This is a very good position for the legs, feet, and back.

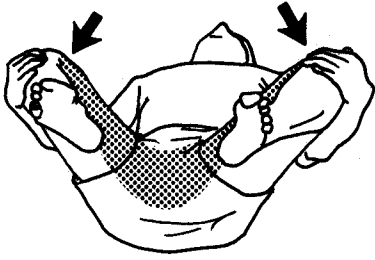


Variation: Pull your knee to your chest, then pull the knee and leg across your body toward your opposite shoulder to create a stretch on the outside of your right hip. Hold an easy stretch for 10–20 seconds. Do both sides.

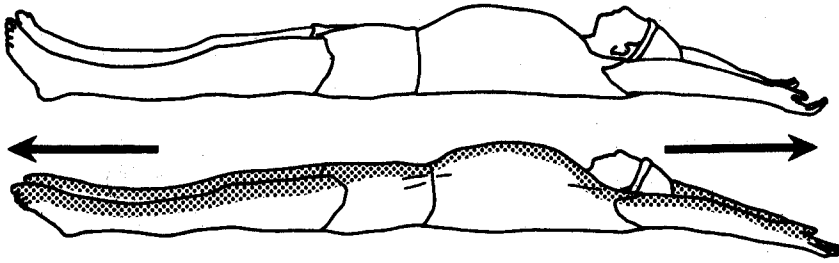
Variation: From a lying position, gently pull your right knee toward the outside of the right shoulder. Your hands should be placed on the back of your leg, just above your knee. Hold for 10–20 seconds. Breathe continuously and deeply. Repeat for the other leg.



After pulling one leg at a time to your chest, pull both legs to your chest. This time concentrate on keeping the back of your head down and then curling your head up toward your knees.

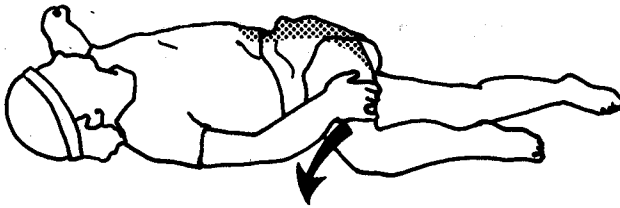


Lie on your back with your knees flexed toward your chest. Place your hands on your lower legs just below your knees. To stretch the insides of your upper legs and groin area, slowly pull your legs out and down until you feel a mild stretch. Hold for 10 seconds. The back of your head can be flat on the floor, resting on a small pillow or up off the floor so that you can look between your legs.

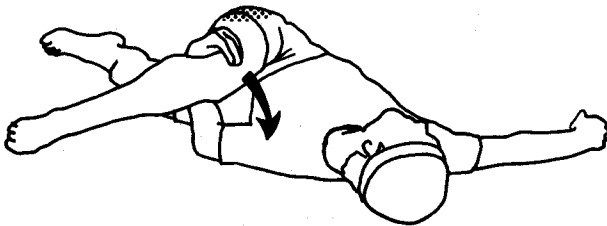


Straighten out both legs again. Stretch and then relax.

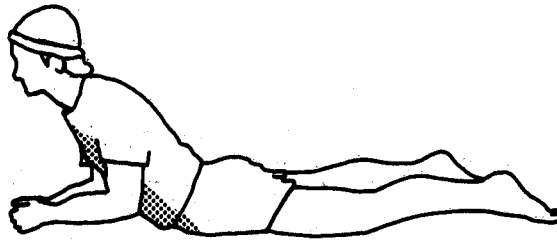
A Stretch for the Lower Back and Side of Hip



Bend your left knee at 90° and, with your right hand, pull that bent leg up and over your other leg as shown above. Turn your head to look toward the hand of the left arm that is straight out from the shoulder (head should be resting on floor, not held up). Now, using the right hand on your left thigh (resting just above knee) pull your bent (left) leg down toward the floor until you get a mild stretch feeling in your lower back and side of hip. Relax your feet and ankles and keep the back of your shoulders flat on the floor. Hold an easy stretch for 15–20 seconds, each side.



To increase the stretch in your buttocks, reach under your right leg and behind your knee. Slowly pull your right knee toward your opposite shoulder until you get a mild stretch. Keep both shoulders flat on the floor. Hold for 15–20 seconds. Do both legs.

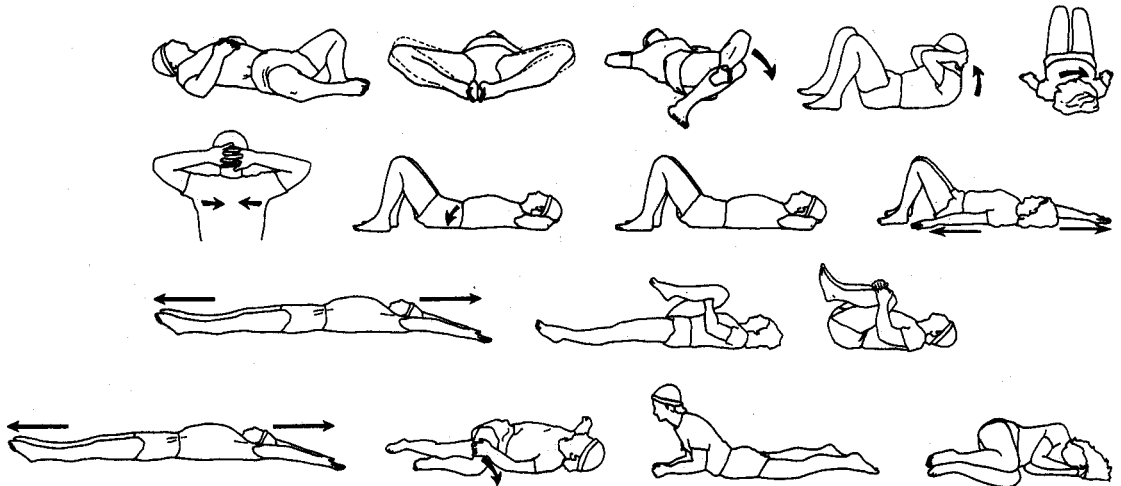


Back Extension: Starting from a prone position (lying on your stomach), place your elbows beneath your shoulders. A mild tension should be felt in the middle to lower back area. Keep the front of the hips on the floor. Hold for 5–10 seconds. Repeat 2–3 times.

You can end a series of stretches for your back by lying in the “fetus position.” Lie on your side with your legs curled up and your head resting on your hands. Relax.



SUMMARY OF STRETCHES FOR YOUR BACK



Do these stretches, in this order, to relax your back.

Learn to listen to your body. If the stretch builds or you feel pain, your body is trying to let you know that something is wrong, that there is a problem. If this happens, ease off gradually until the stretch feels right.