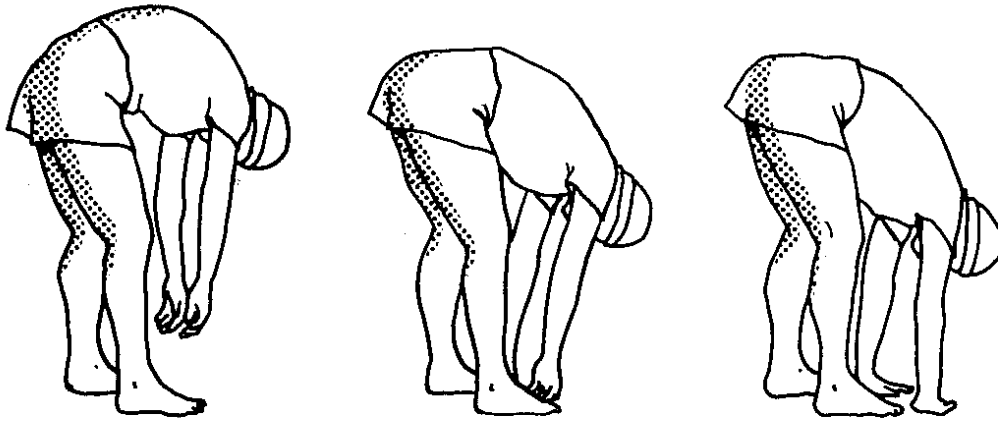


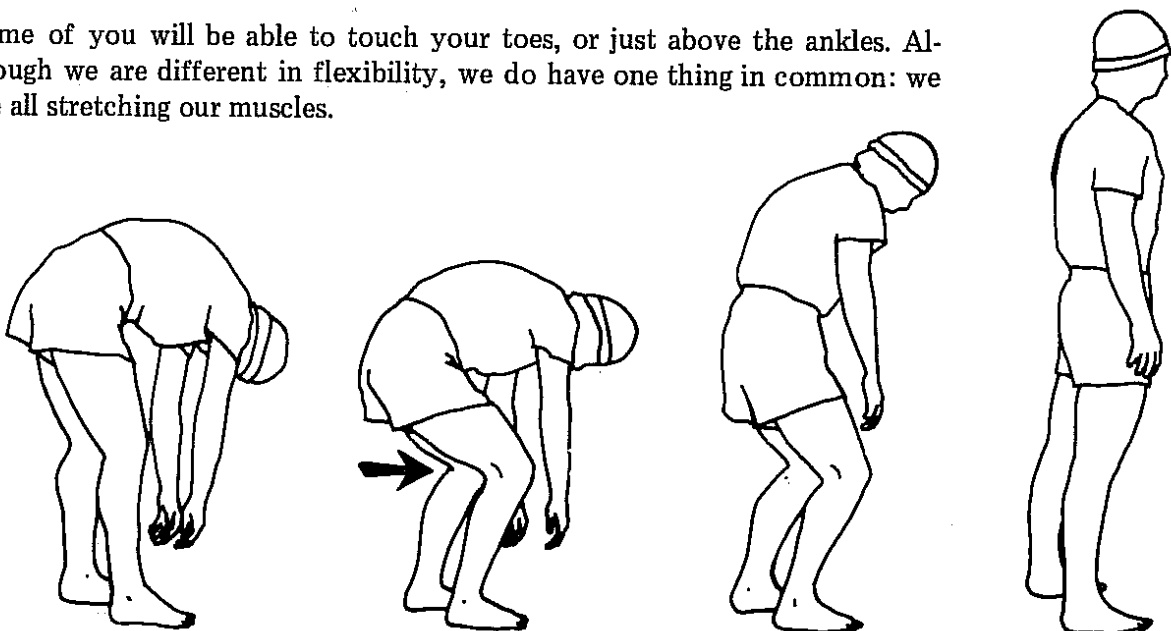
STRETCHES FOR THE LOWER BACK, HIPS, GROIN & HAMSTRINGS



Start in a standing position with feet about shoulder-width apart and pointed straight ahead. Slowly bend forward from the hips. Always keep knees slightly bent during the stretch (1 inch) so lower back is not stressed. Let your neck and arms relax. Go to the point where you feel a slight stretch in the back of your legs. Stretch in this easy phase for 15-25 seconds, until you are relaxed. Let yourself relax physically by mentally concentrating on the area being stretched. Do not stretch with knees locked or bounce when you stretch. Simply hold an easy stretch. Stretch by how you feel and not by how far you can go.

When you do this stretch you will feel it mostly in the hamstrings (back of thighs) and back of the knees. The back will also be stretched, but most of the stretch will be felt in the back of the legs.

Some of you will be able to touch your toes, or just above the ankles. Although we are different in flexibility, we do have one thing in common: we are all stretching our muscles.



Important:

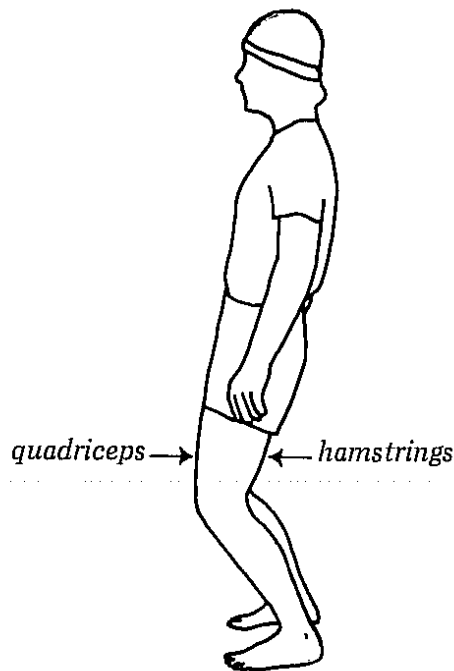
Any time you bend at the waist to stretch, remember to bend your knees

slightly (1 inch or so). It takes the pressure off your lower back. Use the big muscles of the upper legs to stand up, instead of the small muscles of the lower back. Never bring yourself to an upright position with knees locked.

This is a particularly good stretch to do before any kind of heavy labor, especially in the morning or when weather is cold. By protecting the muscles in the lower back, many injuries will be prevented.

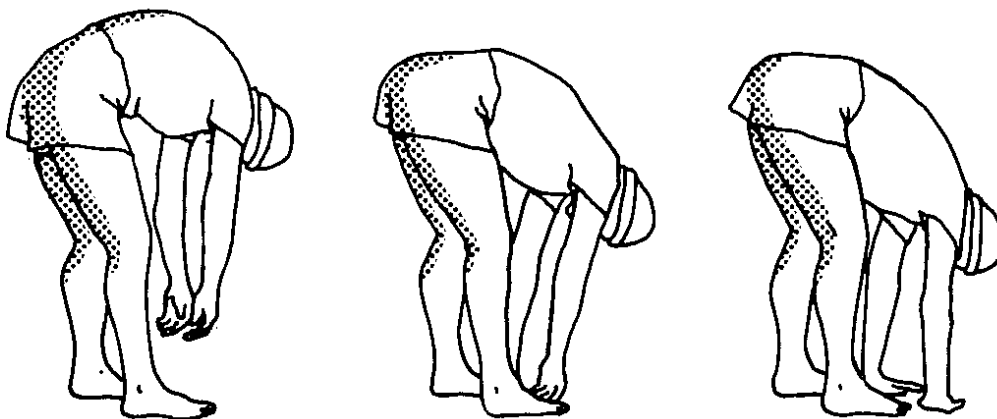
This principle is important in lifting heavy objects off the ground (see p. 106).

Next, assume a bent-knee position with your heels flat, toes pointed straight ahead and feet about shoulder-width apart. Hold this position for 30 seconds.



In this bent-knee position you are tightening the quadriceps and relaxing the hamstrings. The primary function of the quadriceps is to straighten the leg. The basic function of the hamstrings is to bend the knee. Because these muscles have opposing actions, tightening the quadriceps will relax the hamstrings.

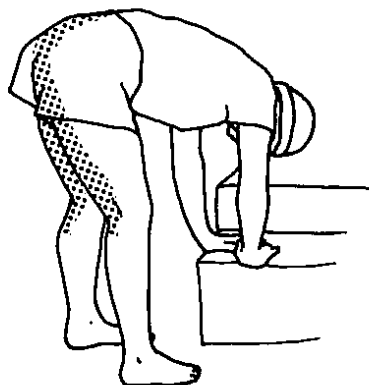
Now, as you hold this bent-knee position, feel the difference between the front of the thigh and the back of the thigh. The quadriceps should feel hard and tight while the hamstrings should feel soft and relaxed. It is easier to stretch the hamstrings if they have been relaxed first.



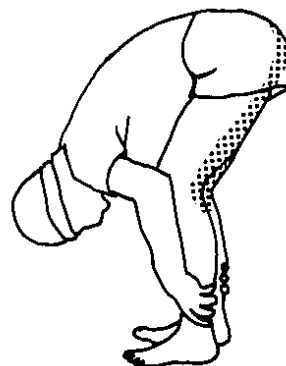
After holding the bent-knee position, stand up and then bend down again with knees slightly bent (1 inch, see p. 52): don't bounce. You probably can go a little farther already. Hold this stretch for about 30 seconds.

A reminder: bend your knees when you stand up.

You must be in a comfortable and stable position when you stretch.

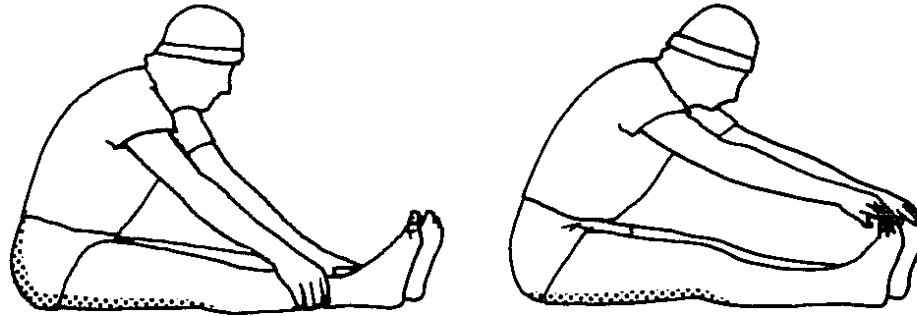


You will find it easier to hold this stretch if you can distribute your weight between your arms and legs. If you are unable to rest your palms on the ground with your knees slightly bent (many people cannot), then use a stair or curb, or a pile of books to rest your hands on. Find an even, light stretch. Find a balance between your hands and feet so you can relax.

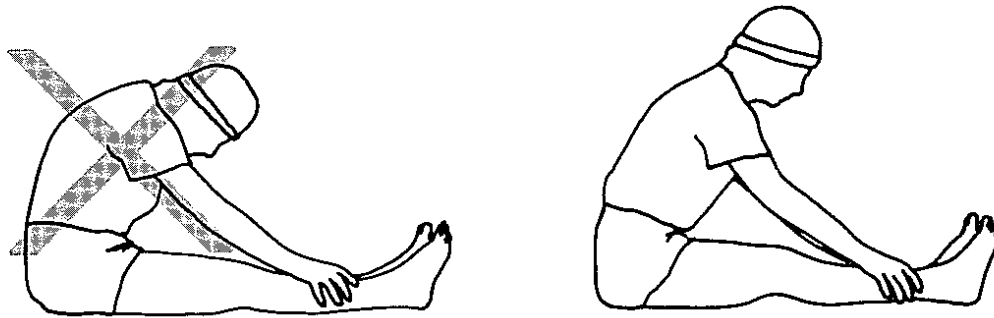


Another variation of this stretch is to hold onto the back of your lower legs in the calf or ankle area with your hands. By pulling your upper body down-

ward with your hands you will be able to increase the stretch in your legs and back, while you concentrate on relaxing in a very stable position. Do not go too far. Pull yourself down only to where you can be relaxed. Stretch and hold. Keep your knees slightly bent.

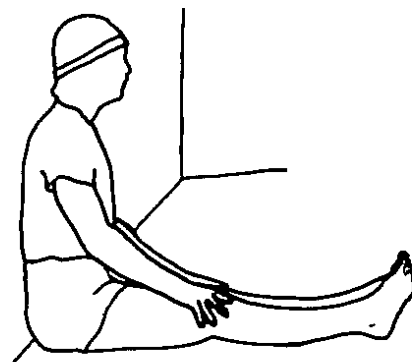


Next, sit down with your legs straight and feet upright, heels no more than six inches apart. Bend from the hips to get an easy stretch. Hold for 20 seconds. You will probably feel this just behind the knees, and in the back of the upper legs. You may also feel a stretch in the lower back if your back is tight.



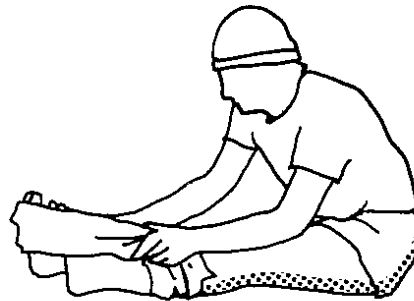
Do not dip your head forward as you begin this stretch. Try to keep your hips from rolling backwards.

Think of bending from your hips without rounding your lower back.



You may need to sit against a wall to keep your lower back flat. This position

in itself may be enough of a stretch for you if you are extremely tight.

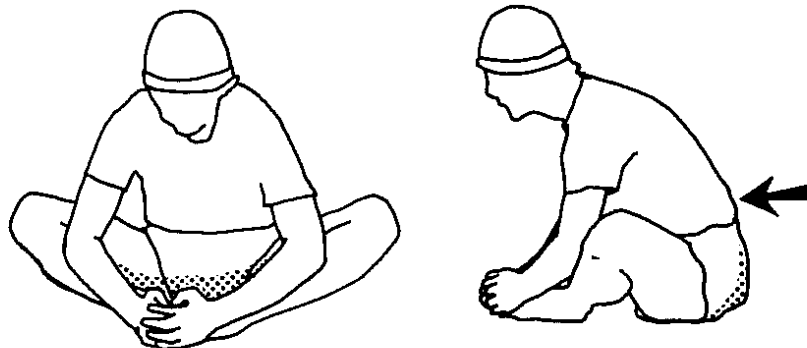


If you have trouble finding a place where you can stretch and relax, then use a towel to help. Place the towel around your feet, grab it by the ends and pull yourself forward from the hips to where you can relax and still get a stretch. Use straight arms to pull yourself forward. Work your way down the towel with your fingers, until the stretch feels right.

If this stretch seems to put pressure on your lower back or you have had lower back problems, do the stretches shown on page 36. This will feel more comfortable.

Be careful when you stretch with both legs in front of you or when bending forward at the hips in a standing position. You must not overstretch in these positions. Since the back of each leg probably differs in tightness and tension, stretching both legs at the same time should be avoided if you have lower back problems. When one or both legs are extremely tight, it is difficult to stretch both legs at the same time and get the correct stretch for each leg. It is easier on your back to stretch each leg separately.

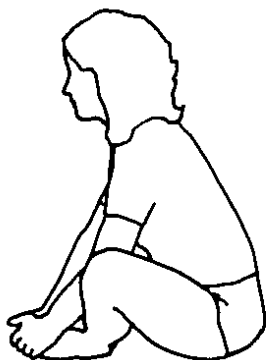
To Stretch the Groin Area



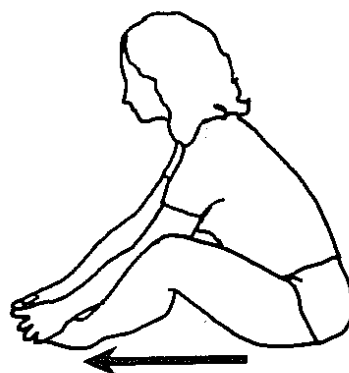
Put the soles of your feet together and hold onto your toes. Gently pull yourself forward, bending from the hips, until you feel a good stretch in your

groin. You may also feel a stretch in the back. Hold for 40 seconds. Do not make initial movement for stretch from head and shoulders. Move from the hips (see p. 15, *Getting Started*). Try to get your elbows on the outside of your legs so the stretch position has stability and balance. It is easier to stretch when you are perfectly stable.

Remember—no bouncing when you stretch. Find a place that is fairly comfortable that allows you to stretch and relax at the same time.

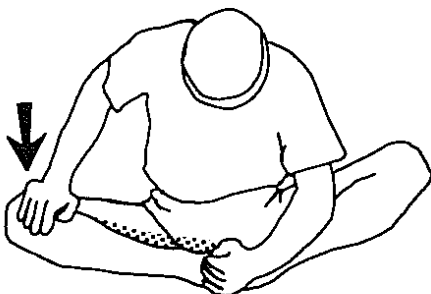


If you have any trouble bending forward, perhaps your heels are too close to your groin area.

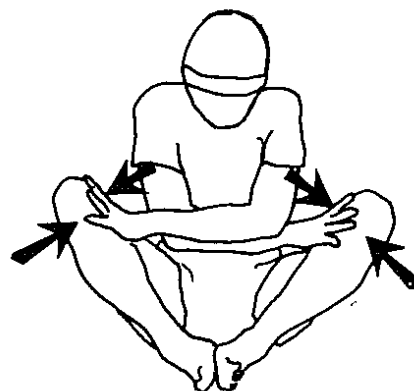


If so, keep your feet farther out in front of you. This will allow you to get movement forward.

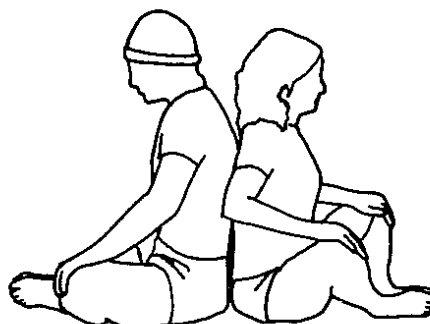
Variations:



Hold on to your feet with one hand, with your elbow on the inside of the lower leg to hold down and stabilize the leg. Now, with your other hand on the inside of your leg (*not on knee*), gently push your leg downward to isolate and stretch this side of the groin. This is a very good isolation stretch for people who want to limber up a tight groin so that the knees can fall more naturally downward.

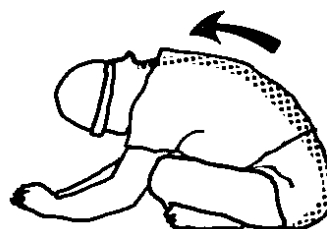


With hands supplying slight resistance on insides of opposite thighs, try to bring knees together, just enough to contract the muscles in the groin. Hold this stabilized tension for 5-8 seconds, then relax and stretch the groin as in the preceding stretches. This will help relax a tight groin area. This technique of tension-relax-stretch is valuable for athletes who have had groin problems.



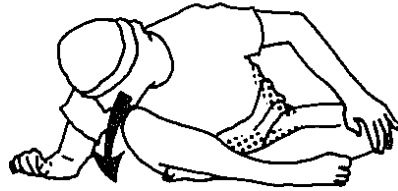
Another way to stretch the tight muscles of the groin area is to sit against a wall or couch: something that will give support. With your back straight and the soles of your feet together, use your hands to push gently down on the inside of your thighs (*not on the knees, just above them*). Push gently until you get a good, even stretch. Hold and relax for 30 seconds.

It is also possible to do this stretch with a partner. Sit back-to-back for stability.



If you've had trouble sitting cross-legged you'll find that these groin stretches will start to make that position easier for you. A good relaxing position that

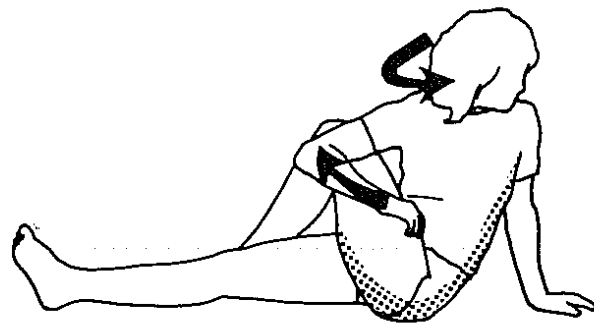
stretches the back and inside of the legs is done by first sitting in the crossed-leg position and then leaning forward until you feel a good comfortable stretch. Get your elbows out in front of you if you can. Hold and relax. This really feels good in the lower back and is a simple stretch for most people.



A variation is to move your upper body over your knee instead of straight ahead. This is good for your hips. Think of bending from the hips.

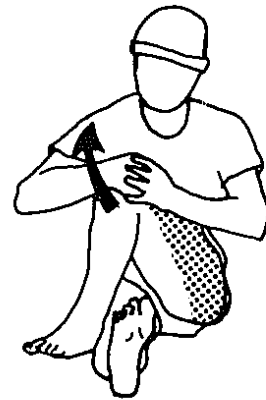
The Spinal Twist:

The spinal twist is good for the upper back, lower back, side of hips, and rib cage. It is also beneficial for internal organs and will help keep your waist-line trim. It will aid in your ability to turn to the side or look behind you without having to turn your entire body.



Sit with your right leg straight. Bend your left leg, cross your left foot over and rest it to the outside of your right knee. Then bend your right elbow and rest it on the outside of your upper left thigh, just above the knee. During the stretch use the elbow to keep this leg stationary with controlled pressure to the inside.

Now, with your left hand resting behind you, slowly turn your head to look over your left shoulder, and at the same time rotate your upper body toward your left hand and arm. As you turn your upper body, think of turning your hips in the same direction (though your hips won't move because your right elbow is keeping the left leg stationary). This should give you a stretch in your lower back and side of hip. Hold for 15 seconds. Do both sides. Don't hold your breath; breathe easily.



Variation: Pull your knee across your body toward your opposite shoulder until an easy stretch is felt on the side of the hip. Hold for 30 seconds. Do both sides.

People tend to spend more time on the first leg, arm, or area they stretch, and they usually will stretch their “easy” or more flexible side first. Because of this natural tendency more time is spent on the “good” side and less on the “bad” side. To even out the difference in flexibility in your body, stretch your tight side first. This will help you limber up considerably.

SUMMARY

