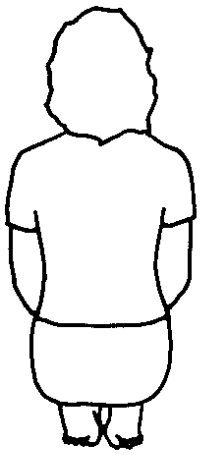
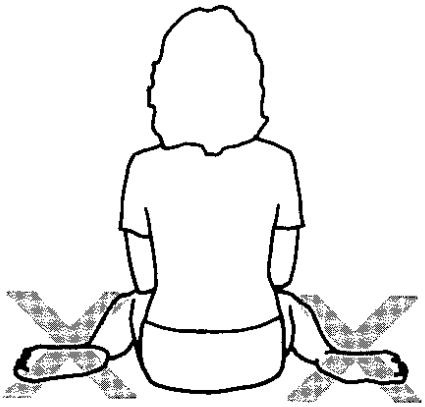
A SERIES OF STRETCHES FOR THE LEGS

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:

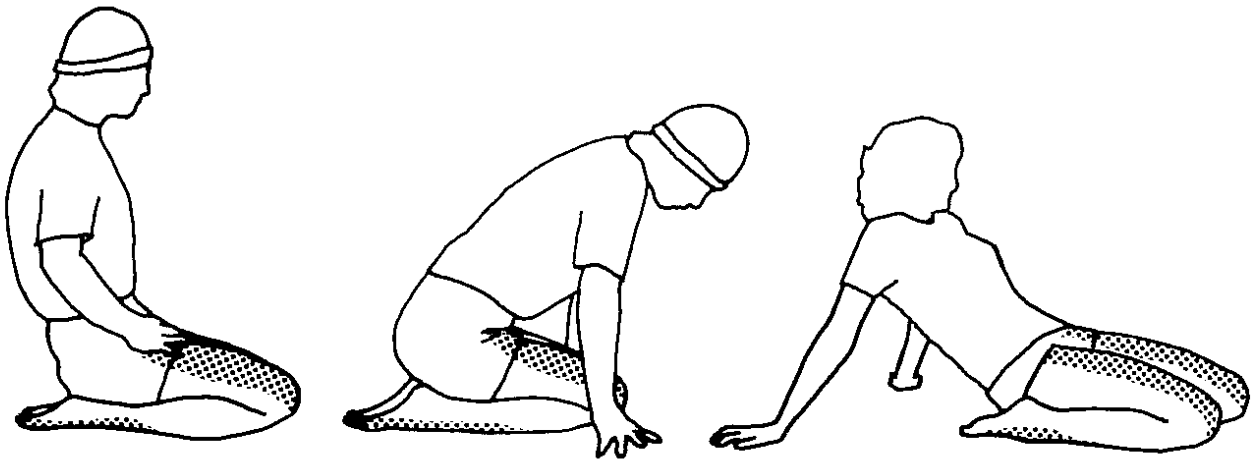


This position helps stretch the knees, ankles, and quadriceps. The toe pointer will also help relax the calves so they may be stretched more easily.



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.

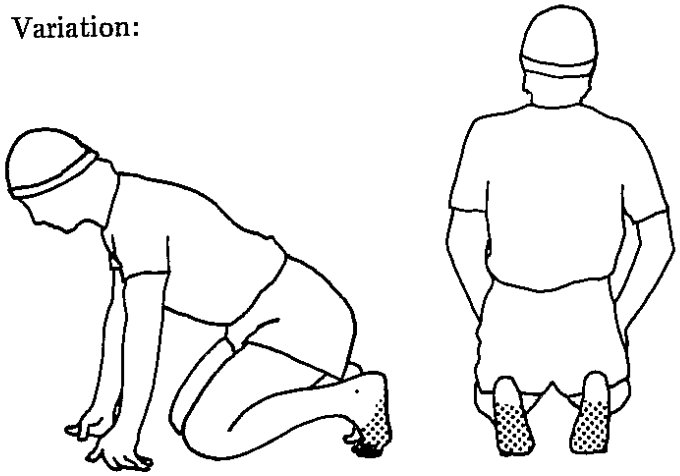
Caution: *If you have or have had knee problems be very careful bending the knees underneath you. Do it slowly and under control.*



Most women will not feel much of a stretch in this position. But for tight people, especially men, this 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.

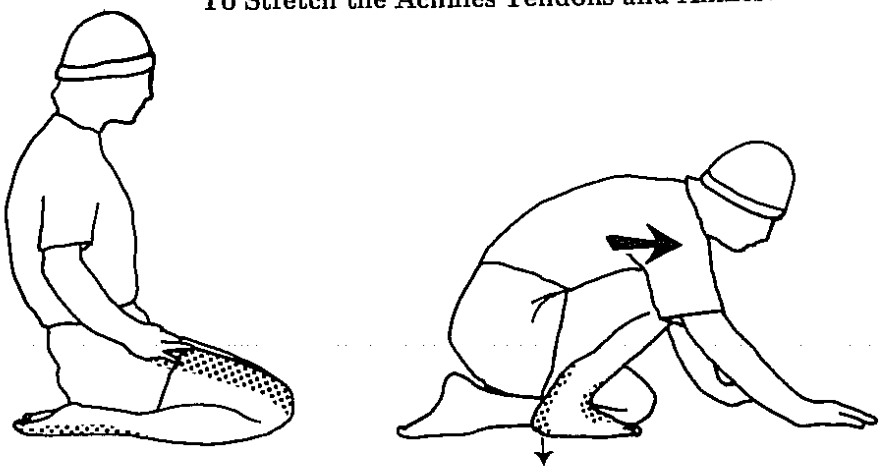
If you are tight, do not overstretch. Regularity with stretching creates positive change. There will be noticeable improvement in ankle flexibility within several weeks.

Variation:



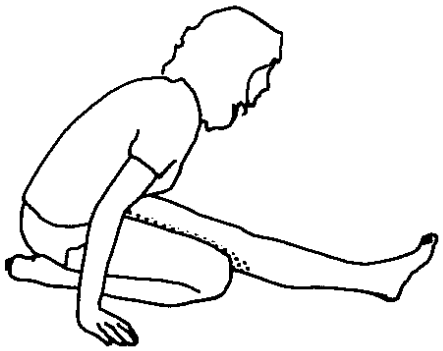
To stretch your toes and longitudinal arch, sit with toes underneath you (see above). Put your hands in front of you for balance and control. If more stretch is desired, slowly lean backwards until it feels right. Hold only stretches that feel good and you can control. Stretch easily for 15 seconds. Be careful. There may be a lot of tension in this part of the foot and toes. Have patience with yourself. Gradually get your body used to changing by regular stretching. Then return to toe pointer after doing this stretch.

To Stretch the Achilles Tendons and Ankles:



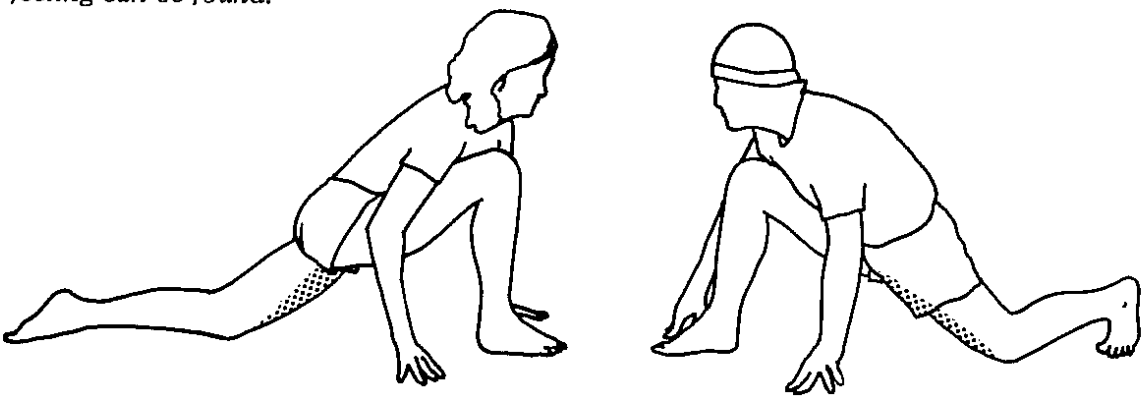
Bring the toes of one foot almost even or parallel to the knee of the other leg. Let the heel of the bent leg come off the ground one-half inch or so. Lower heel toward ground while pushing forward on your thigh (just above the knee) with your chest and shoulder. The idea is not to get the heel flat but to use the forward pressure from your shoulder on your thigh to give an easy stretch to the Achilles tendon. All that is needed to adequately stretch the Achilles tendon is a *very slight stretch*. Hold 15 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 a lot different than the other in flexibility and feeling. 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 ankles and arches. One way to reduce or eliminate the pain and soreness of new activity is to stretch before and after exercise.



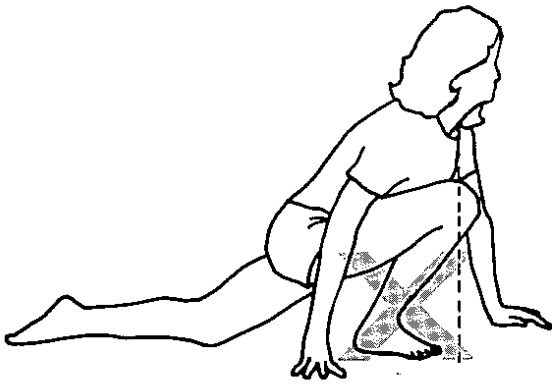
To stretch the hamstrings from the toe pointer position, extend or straighten one leg out in front of you, with the heel of that forward foot resting on the floor and the other leg still bent under you. *Be sure to use your arms and hands for balance and support* so you don't have too much pressure on the leg you are sitting on, nor too much of a stretch in the hamstrings you are stretching. *This is an advanced stretch for the hamstrings.* It intensifies the stretch in the straight leg. Gently bend forward from the waist until you feel an easy stretch. Hold for 20 seconds. Keep your butt close to the heel of the bent leg. Stretch within your comfortable limits.

Be careful if you have or have had knee problems. Do not stretch with any feeling of actual pain. Learn how to control yourself so the proper stretch feeling can be found.



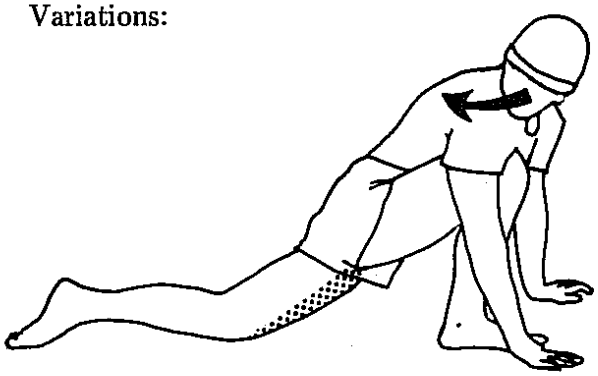
To stretch the muscles in the front of the hip (*iliopsoas*), move one leg forward until the knee of the forward leg is directly over the ankle. Your other knee should be resting on the floor. Now, without changing the position of the knee on the floor or the forward foot, lower the front of your hip downward to create an easy stretch. Hold for 30 seconds. You should feel this stretch in the front of the hip and possibly in the hamstrings and groin. This is excellent for lower back problems.

Stretching for 10-30 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 and feel for yourself the difference the next morning.

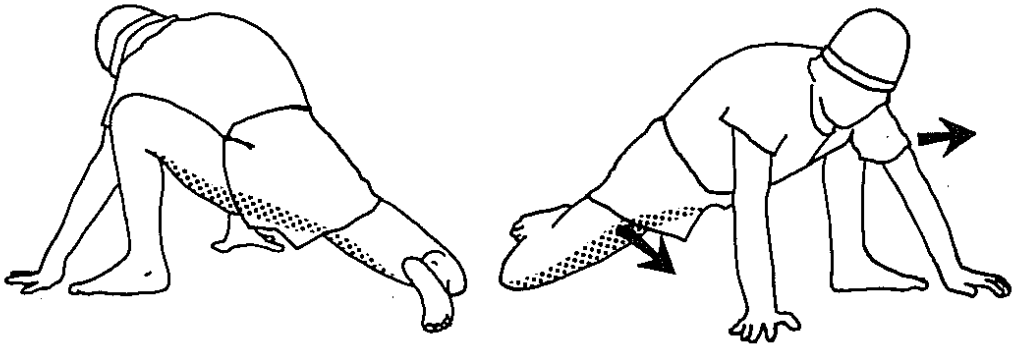


Do not have your knee forward of the ankle. This will hinder the proper stretching of the hip and legs. The greater distance there is between the back knee and the heel of the front foot, the easier it is to stretch the hip and legs.

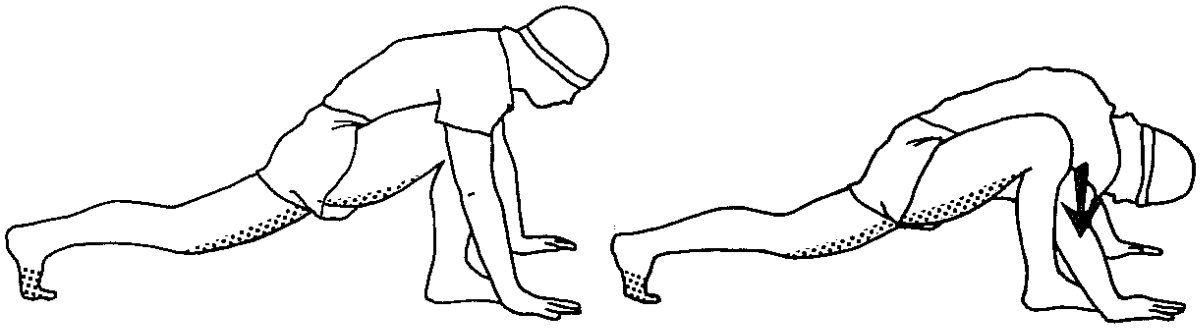
Variations:



Turn the left hip slowly to the inside to change the area of the stretch. By only slightly changing the angles of stretch you are able to stretch many different, adjacent areas of the body. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds. This is excellent for hips, lower back, and groin. Also, get used to looking over your shoulder, behind you, to add a further stretch to the position.

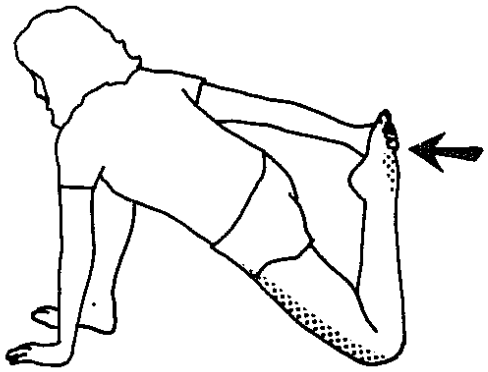


From the previous hip stretch you can isolate a stretch in the inside of the upper leg. Bend your rear knee and move your rear foot to the inside. This will make a 90° angle at the knee joint. Now move your shoulders off your knee and put your hands to the inside of your body for support. Move hips downward 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 25 seconds.

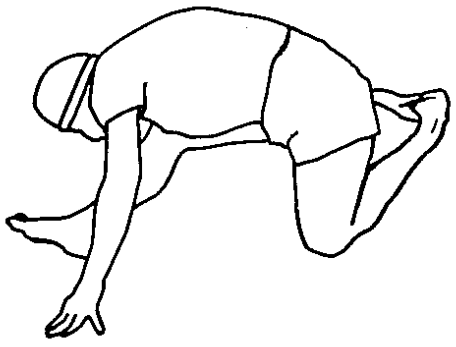


With your front knee directly above your ankle, shift your weight up onto the toes and ball of your back foot. Now hold an easy stretch with a fairly straight back leg for 20 seconds. Think of the front of your hip going down to create the right stretch tension. Use hands for balance. This stretches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

Another variation is to change the stretch by gently lowering your upper body to the inside of the knee of the forward leg. Hold a comfortable stretch for 20 seconds.



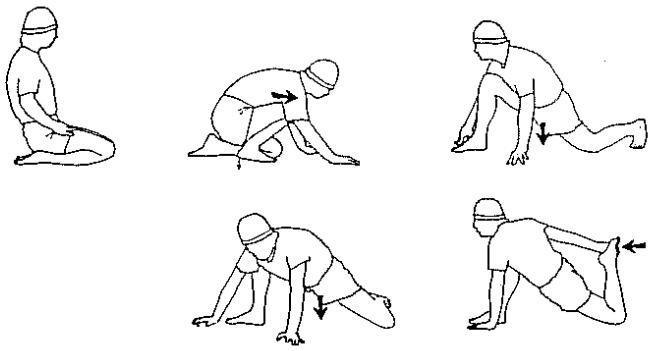
To stretch the quadricep muscle, reach behind you with your right hand and grab the top of your left foot between your ankle and toes. Now slowly lower the front of your hip downward as you gently pull your left heel toward the middle of your buttocks until you feel a slight stretch. Hold an easy stretch 20 seconds. A great position to isolate a stretch in. *Be careful if you have had knee problems.*



If you cannot easily reach your foot, move your hips back without changing the position of your front foot and back knee. Lean back and grab the top

of your foot with your opposite hand, then move your hips slightly forward and downward as you pull your heel to the middle of your buttocks. You may need to move only an inch or two forward to create a feeling of stretch. Hold a slight stretch for 15 seconds. Be careful not to overstretch as you lean forward.

SUMMARY



You would think we would know a great deal about staying in shape from the thousands of hours invested in high school P.E. classes. Yet most of us learned only games and sports. Ask yourself: What do I do in my daily living that I enjoy and was taught in school? It's amazing to think how little we learned in all those hours. We could have learned how to take care of ourselves, how to keep from becoming old before our time, and how to avoid suffering from back problems brought about by bad habits. But now we are teaching ourselves what we should have learned in school; and we haven't started any too soon.