Caring for Your Back

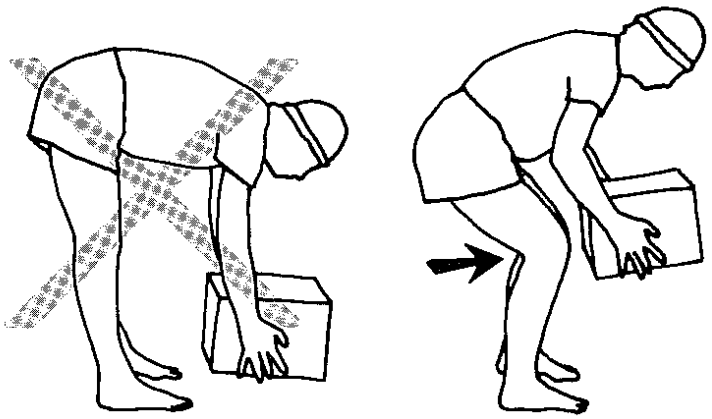
More than 50% of all Americans will suffer from some sort of back problem some time during their lifetime. Some problems may be congenital, such as sway back or scoliosis (lateral curvature of the spine). Others may be the result of an automobile accident, a fall, or sports injury (in which case the pain may subside, only to reappear years later). But most back problems are simply due to tension and muscular tightness, which come from poor posture, being overweight, inactivity, and lack of abdominal strength.

Stretching and abdominal exercises can help your back if done with common sense. If you have a back problem, consult a reliable physician who will give you tests to see exactly where the problem lies. Ask your physician which of the stretches and exercises shown in this book would be of most help to you.

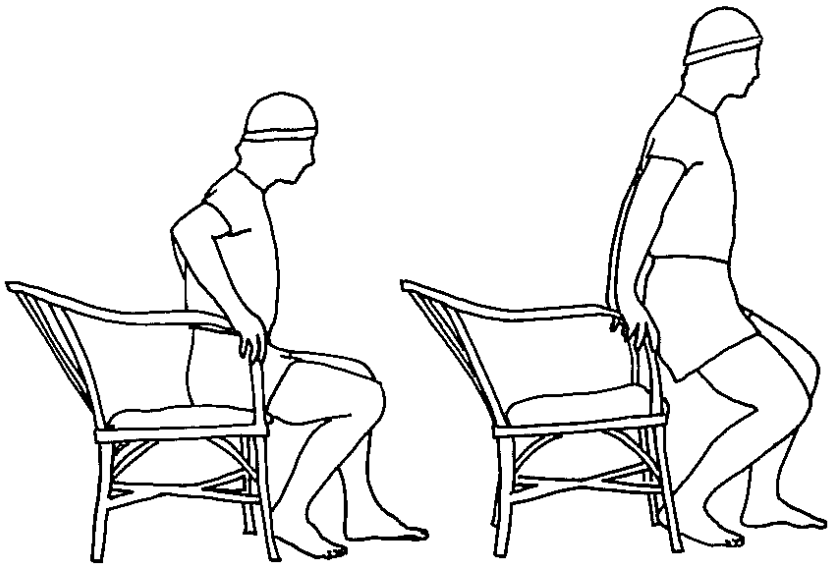
Anyone with a history of lower back problems should avoid stretches that arch the back, called hyperextensions. This creates too much stress on the lower back, and for this reason I have not included any such stretches in this book.

The best way to take care of your back is to use proper methods of stretching, strengthening, standing, sitting and sleeping. For it is what we do moment to moment, day to day that determines our total health. In the following pages are some suggestions for back care. Also see p. 107.

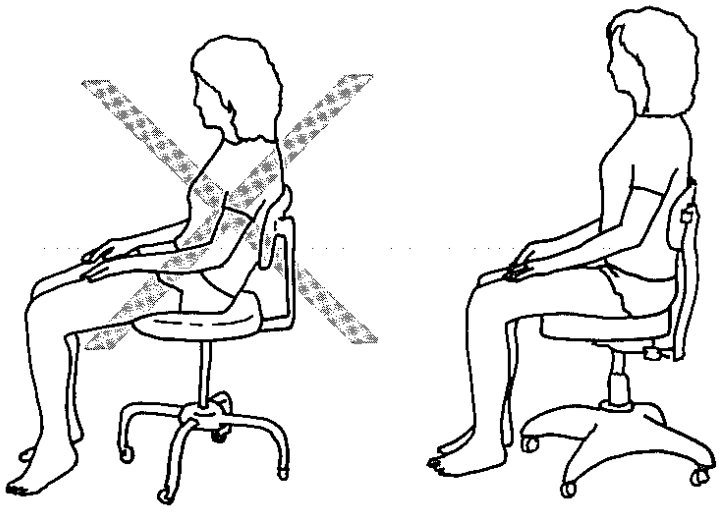
Some Suggestions for Back Care and Posture:



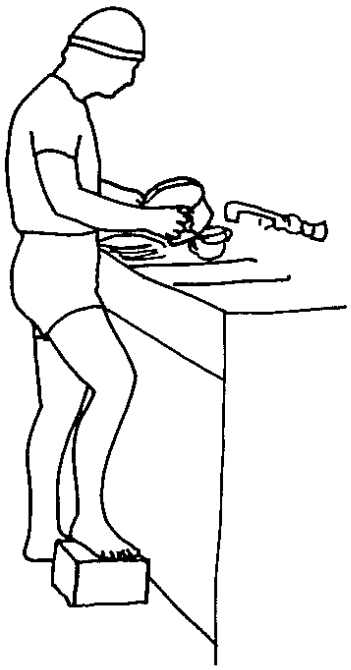
Never lift anything (heavy *or* light) with your legs straight. Always bend your knees when lifting something, so the bulk of the work is done by the big muscles of your legs, not the small muscles of your lower back. Keep the weight close to your body and your back as straight as possible.



Getting in and out of chairs can be a hazard to your back. Always have one foot in front of the other when rising from a chair. Slide your butt to the edge and, with your back vertical and chin in, use your thigh muscles and arms to push yourself straight up.



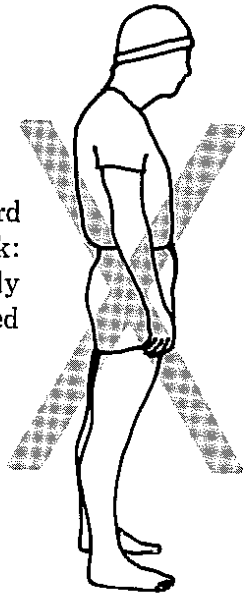
If your shoulders are rounded and your head tends to droop forward, bring yourself into new alignment. This position, when practiced regularly, will lessen back tension and keep the body fresh with energy. Pull your chin in slightly (not down, not up), with the back of your head being pulled straight up. Think of shoulders back and down. Breathe with the idea that you want the middle of your back to expand outward. Tighten your abdominal muscles as you flatten your lower back into the chair. Do while driving or sitting to take pressure off the lower back. Practice this often and you will naturally train your muscles to hold this more alive alignment without conscious effort.



If you stand in one place for a period of time, as when doing the dishes, prop one foot up on a box or short stool. This will relieve some of the back tension that comes from prolonged standing.



When standing, your knees should be slightly bent (½ inch), with feet pointed straight ahead. Keeping the knees slightly bent prevents the hips from rotating forward. Use the big muscles in the front of the upper legs (quadriceps) to control your posture when standing.



Do not stand with knees locked. This tilts the hips forward and puts the pressure of standing directly on the lower back: a position of weakness. Let the quadriceps support the body in a position of strength. Your body will be more aligned through the hips and lower back with knees slightly bent.



A good, firm sleeping surface helps in back care. If possible, sleep on one side or the other. Sleeping on your stomach can cause tightness in the lower back. If you sleep on your back, putting a pillow under your knees will keep the lower back flat and minimize tension.

When you are aware that your posture is bad, automatically adjust yourself into a more upright, energetic position. Good posture is developed through the constant awareness of how you sit, stand, walk, and sleep.



Many tight and so-called bad backs can be caused by excessive weight around the middle. Without the support of strong abdominal muscles, this extra weight will gradually cause a forward pelvic tilt, causing pain and tension in the lower back. Here is a suggested routine to improve this abnormal condition:

1. Develop the abdominal muscles by regularly doing the abdominal workout (ab curl, elbow-knee, and alternating elbow-knee ab curl, pp. 153–54). Again, exercise within your limits. It takes time and regularity. But if you don't get into it, the condition will only worsen.

2. Develop the muscles of the chest and arms by doing the knee push-ups (p. 155). These push-ups isolate the muscles in the upper body without straining the lower back. Start an easy three-set routine like: 10-8-6, or whatever—just get started!

3. Stretch the muscles in the front of each hip as shown on p. 48, and stretch the muscles of the lower back (pp. 24-30 and 62-67). By strengthening the abdominal area and stretching the hip and back areas, you can gradually undo this forward pelvic tilt which is, in so many cases, the main cause of back problems.

4. Slowly let the size of your stomach shrink by not overeating. A person who is overweight needs more food to fill an over-stretched stomach than a highly conditioned athlete who works out regularly.

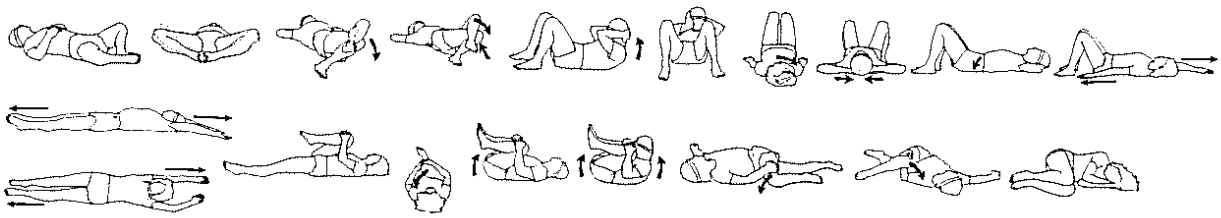
5. Learn how to walk before you jog, and jog before you run. If you walk a mile a day (at one time) everyday, without increasing your calory intake, you will lose ten pounds in one year. □

Stretching and Exercise Prescriptions

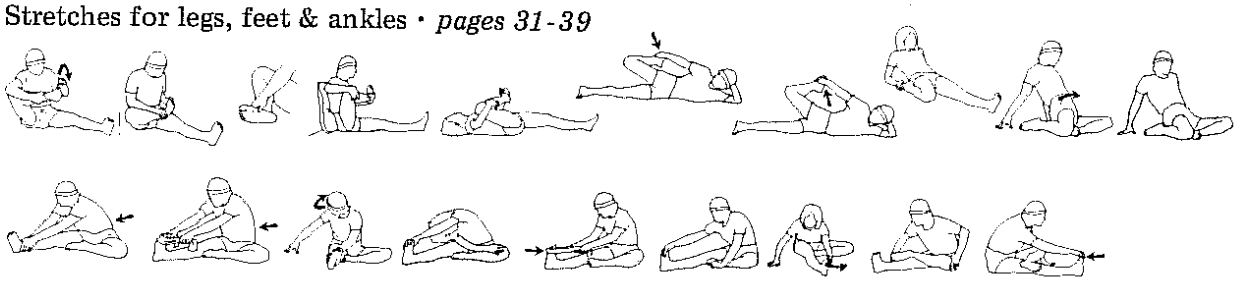
Here is a summary of the stretches and exercises in this book that can be used by health care professionals when prescribing individual fitness and rehabilitation programs. Circle the stretches and exercises that are appropriate for the individual.

STRETCHES

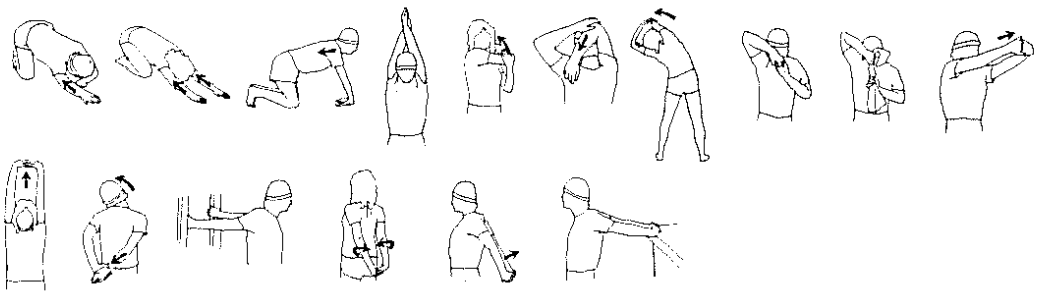
Relaxing stretches for your back · *pages 24-30*



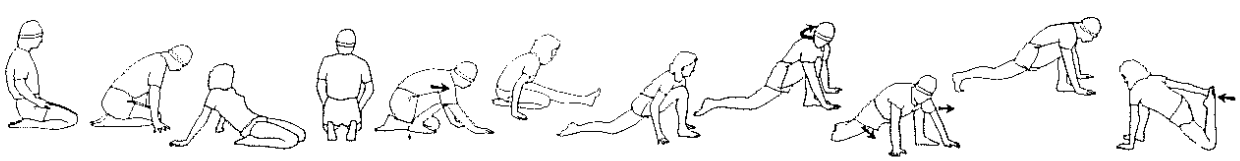
Stretches for legs, feet & ankles · *pages 31-39*



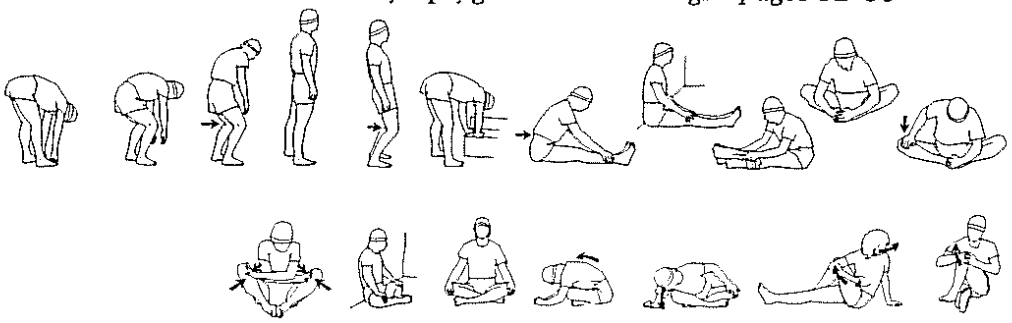
Stretches for the back, shoulders & arms · *pages 40-45*



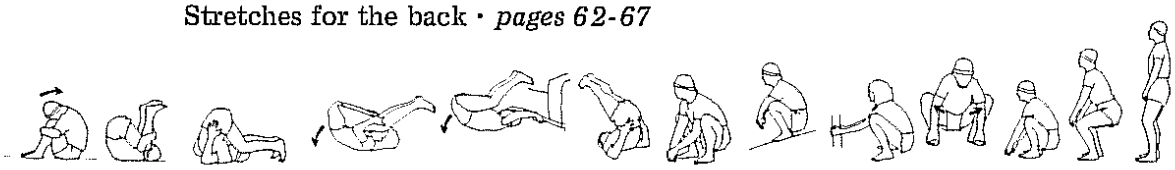
A series of stretches for the legs · *pages 46-51*



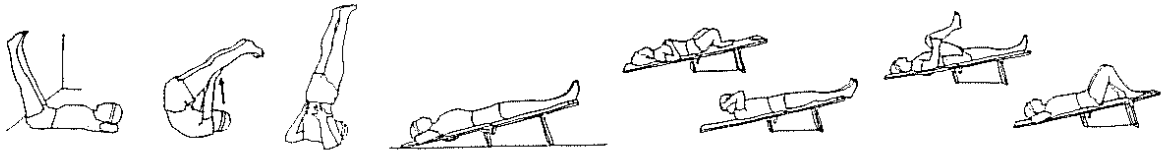
Stretches for the lower back, hips, groin & hamstrings · *pages 52-60*



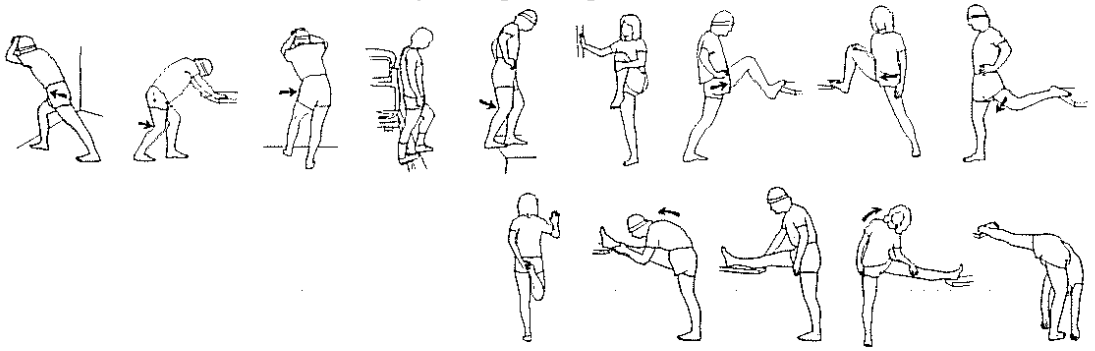
Stretches for the back · *pages 62-67*



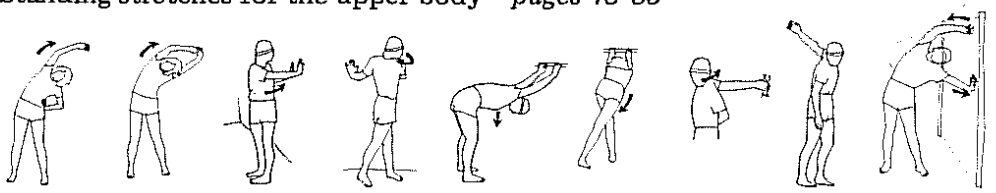
Elevating your feet · *pages 68-70*



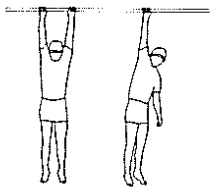
Standing stretches for legs & hips · *pages 71-77*



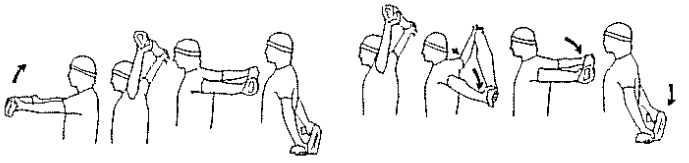
Standing stretches for the upper body · *pages 78-83*



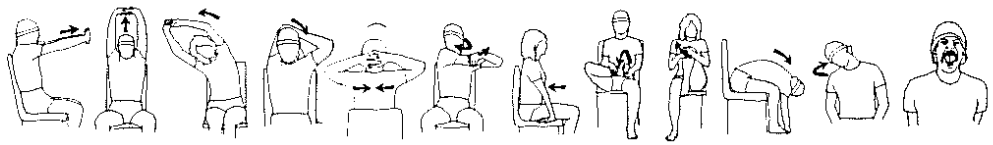
Stretching on a chin bar · *page 84*



Stretches for upper body using a towel · *pages 85-86*



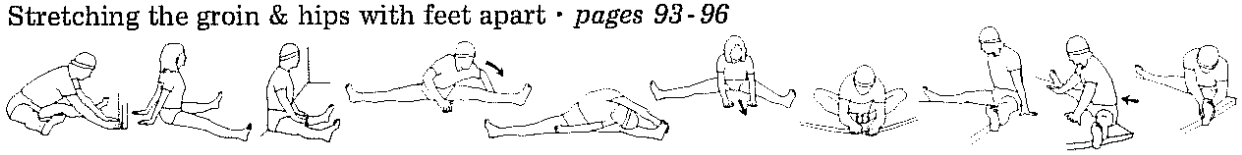
Sitting stretches · *pages 87-90*



Leg & groin stretches with feet elevated · *pages 91-92*



Stretching the groin & hips with feet apart · *pages 93-96*

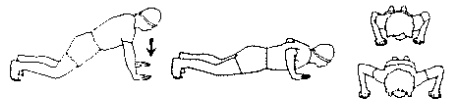


EXERCISES FOR DEVELOPING STRENGTH

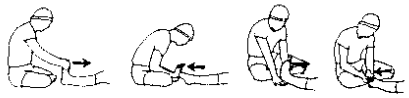
Abdominals · *pages 152-154*



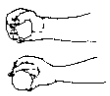
Arms & chest · *pages 155-156*



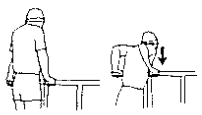
Ankles, toes & lower legs · *pages 156-159*



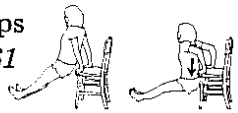
Fingers, hands, wrists & forearms · *page 160*



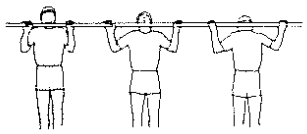
Bar dips · *page 161*



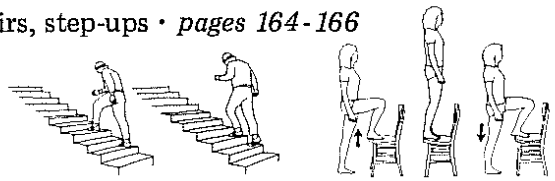
Seat drops · *page 161*



Chin-ups · *pages 162-164*



Stairs, step-ups · *pages 164-166*



AEROBIC EXERCISE walking, running, cycling, swimming, etc. · *pages 167-178*

LIGHT, NUTRITIOUS EATING · *pages 179-181*

CARING FOR THE BACK · *pages 182-185*



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Impressive facts and simple explanations about the necessity of pure water for good health.

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Excellent book on breathing exercises and the importance of oxygen. I do these exercises every day.

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