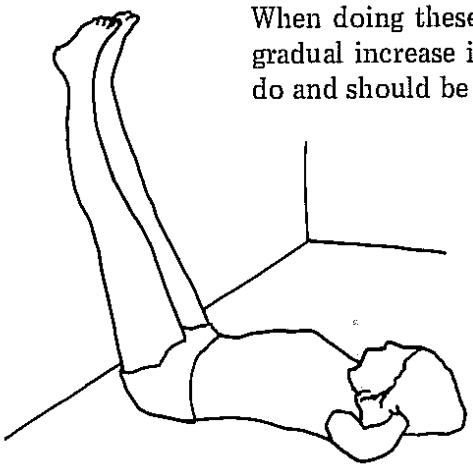
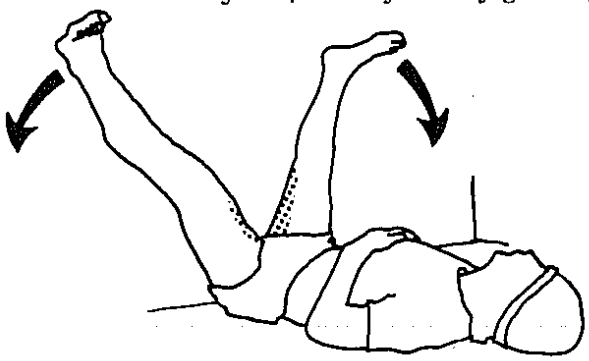
LEG AND GROIN STRETCHES WITH FEET ELEVATED

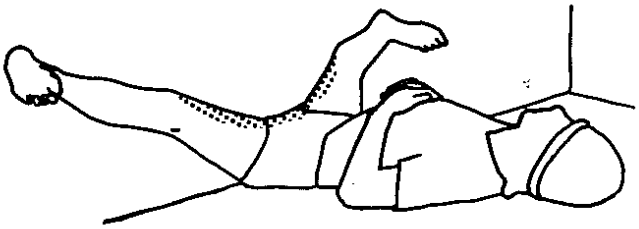
A wall is very useful for stretching the legs, while you relax on your back. When doing these stretches you must be aware of the easy stretch, then the gradual increase into the developmental stretch. These stretches are easy to do and should be approached this way.



Start with your legs elevated and close together, with your butt about 3-5 inches away from the wall so that your lower back is flat and not arched or off the floor. At first elevate your feet this way for only about one minute. Gradually increase the time until you can do it for 5-8 minutes. If your feet start to go to sleep, roll over on your side and then sit up. (See p. 19 for the proper way to sit up from this position.) *Don't get up quickly after elevating your feet* or you may get a light-headed feeling.



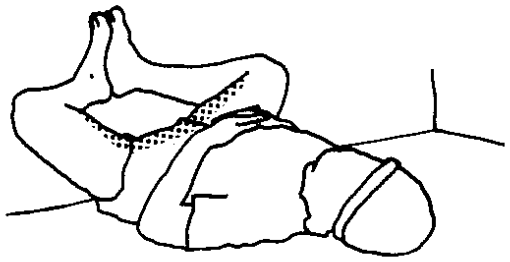
It is possible to stretch your groin from this position by slowly separating your legs, with your heels resting on the wall, until you feel an easy stretch. Hold the stretch 30 seconds and relax.



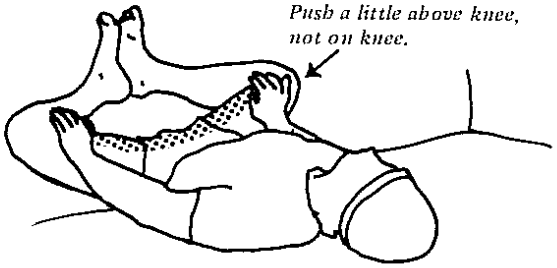
As this position becomes easier with time and patience you can gradually stretch further by lowering your legs. An advanced position is shown here. Do not try to copy this, but stretch within *your* limits. Do not strain. The wall makes it possible to hold these stretches longer in a relaxed, stable position, without wasting energy due to lack of balance.

Remember to keep your butt 3-5 inches from the wall. If you are too close to the wall you may feel tightness in your lower back.

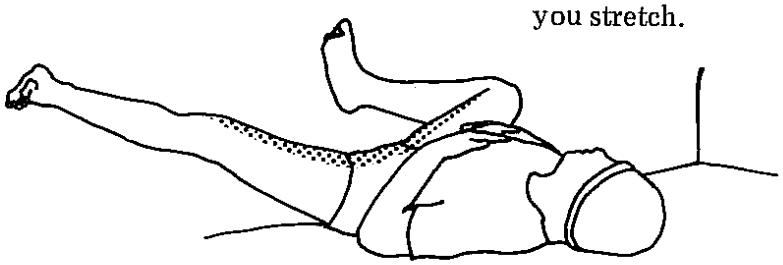
Variation:



Put the soles of your feet together, resting them against the wall. Relax.

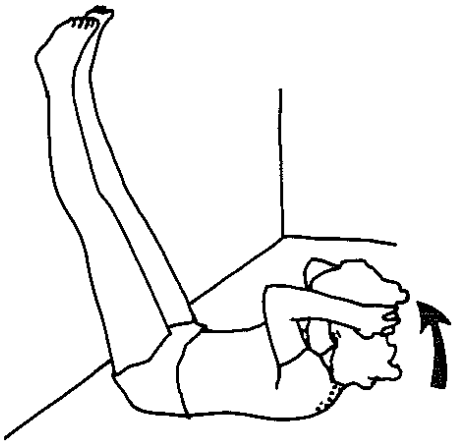


To increase the stretch, use your hands to gently push down on the inside of your thighs until you feel a good, easy stretch. Relax while you stretch.

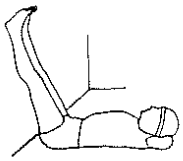


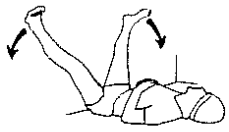
To isolate and increase the stretch in each side of the groin area, straighten one leg out.

To stretch your neck from this position, interlace your fingers behind your head (at about ear level) and gently pull your head forward until you feel an easy stretch. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 2 or 3 times. (See p. 25 for further information on neck stretches.)



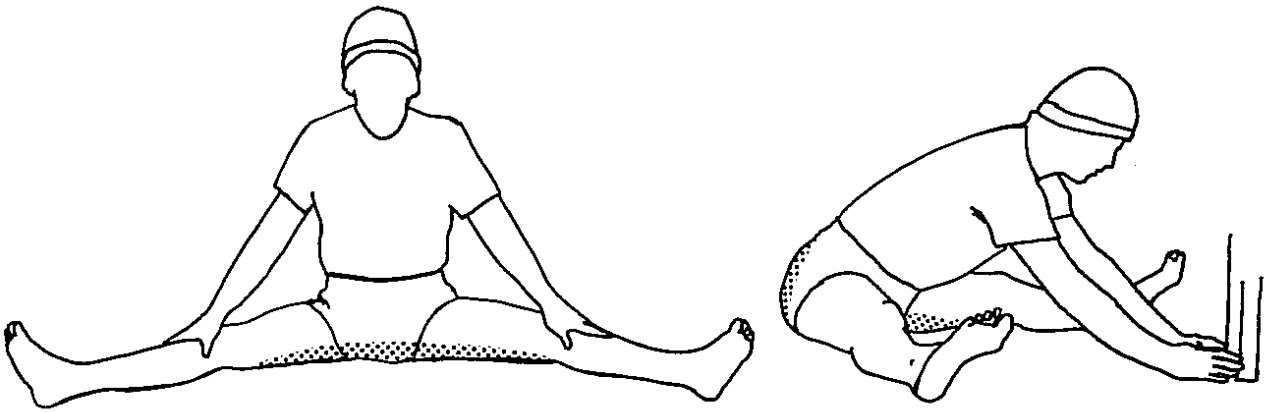
SUMMARY



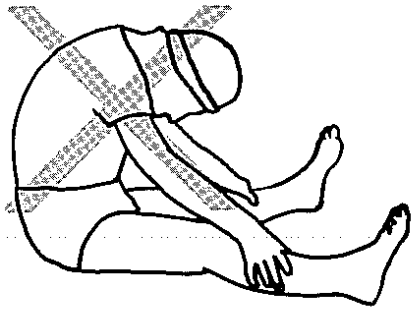


STRETCHING THE GROIN AND HIPS WITH LEGS APART

The following stretches will make lateral movement easier, help maintain flexibility, and can prevent injuries. Gradually become accustomed to these stretches, which are primarily for the center of your body.

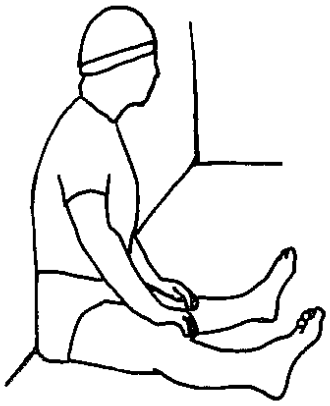


Sit with your feet a comfortable distance apart. To stretch the inside of your upper legs and hips, slowly lean forward from your hips. Be sure to keep your quadriceps relaxed and feet upright. Hold for 35 seconds. Keep your hands out in front of you for balance and stability or hold on to something for greater control.

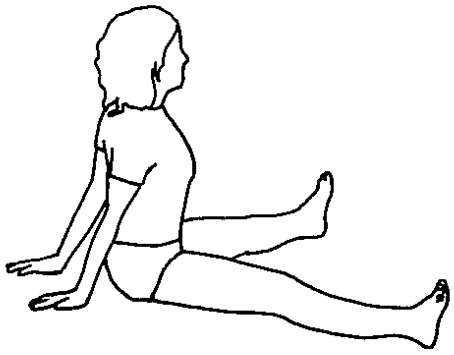


Do not lean forward with your head and shoulders. This will cause your hips to move backward and put pressure on your lower back. If, when you lean forward, you lower back is rounded, it is because your hips, lower back, hamstrings and groin are tight. To bend from your hips correctly, you must keep your back straight.

Don't stretch to be flexible. Stretch to feel good.

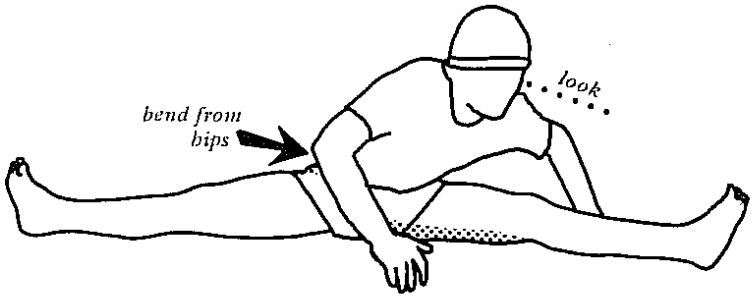


A good way to gradually adapt your hips and lower back to a proper, upright position is to sit with your lower back flat against a wall. Hold an easy stretch for 30 seconds.

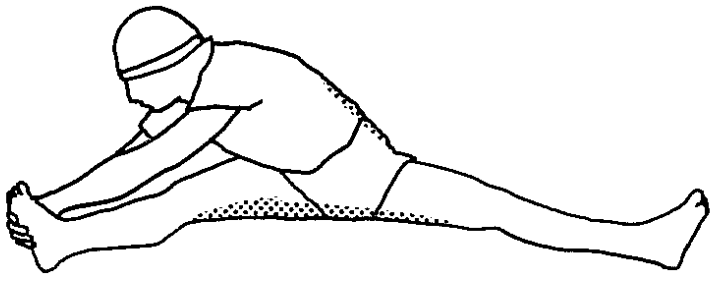


Another way is to sit with your hands behind you. Using your arms as a support will help lengthen your spine as you concentrate on moving your hips slightly forward. Hold for 20 seconds.

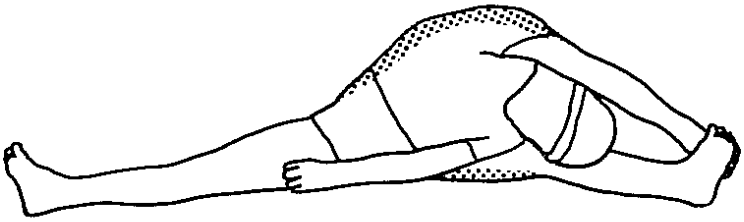
Do not bend forward until you are able to feel comfortable doing the above. Get your body used to this position before you try to stretch any further.



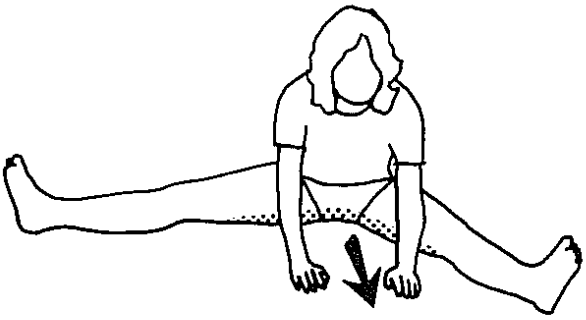
Variation: To stretch your left hamstrings and the right side of your back, slowly bend forward from the hips, toward the foot of your left leg. Keep your chin in and back straight. Hold a good stretch for at least 30-40 seconds. If necessary use a towel.



Another variation is to reach across your body with the left hand to the right foot, putting your right hand out to the right side for balance. This will increase the stretch in your hamstrings and in your back, as far up as the shoulder blades and as far down as the hips. Do this across-the-body stretch in both directions.



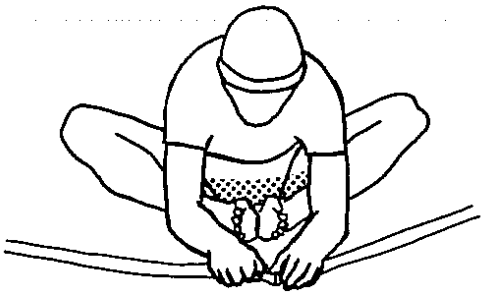
An Advanced Stretch: Reach overhead with hand and grasp opposite foot. Keep your other arm resting close to your body in front of you. This is a good lateral stretch for the back and good for legs. Hold for 30 seconds. Do both sides. Do not overstretch.



Learn to hold stretch tensions at various angles. Stretch forward, left, and right, then teach yourself to hold stretches at angles toward left center and right center. Use the same leg and upper body alignment as previously described. Hold for 30 seconds. Stretch with complete self-control.

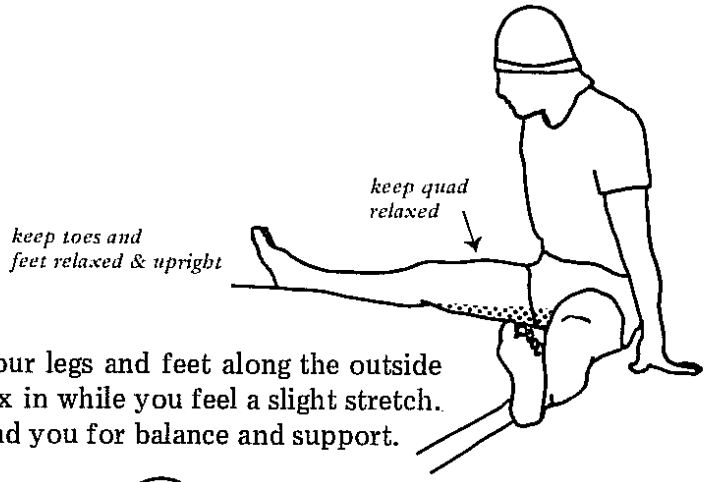
If you feel and look tight doing these stretches do not be discouraged. Stretch without worrying about flexibility. Then you can gradually adapt your body to these new angles with stretch tensions that feel right.

An additional way to stretch the groin:

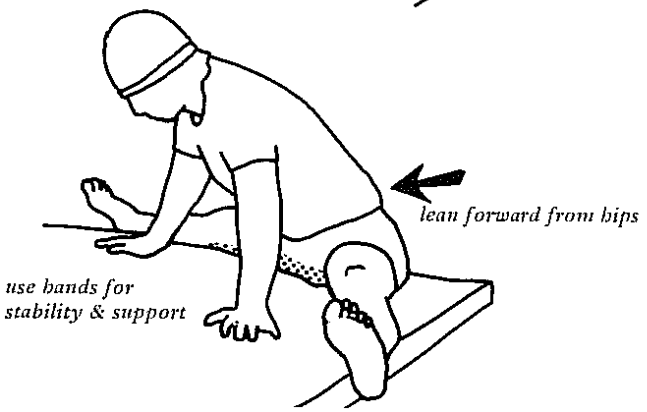


With the soles of your feet together, lean forward and hold on to something near the floor in front of you (this may be the edge of the mat, or the leg of a piece of furniture). Use this object to help you hold a comfortable stretch and to pull yourself forward to increase the stretch. Do not overstretch. Hold and relax for 20-30 seconds. This is a more advanced stretch for the groin.

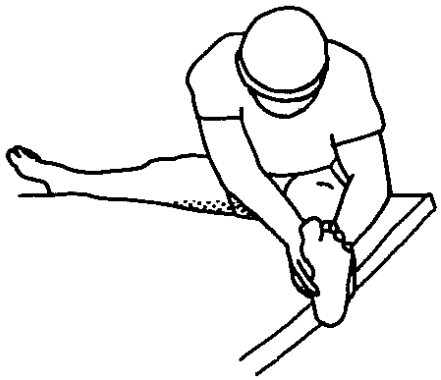
Holding on to the corner of a gymnastics mat will stabilize your legs and make it easier to hold a stretch when you are sitting with legs apart.



Sitting on the corner of the mat, place your legs and feet along the outside edges. Find a position that is easy to relax in while you feel a slight stretch. Hold for 40 seconds. Use your hands behind you for balance and support.



To increase the stretch, move your butt and hips forward, sliding your legs down along the sides of the mat. Keep toes and feet upright. Do not let your legs turn in or out. A good stretch for limbering up groin and hips.

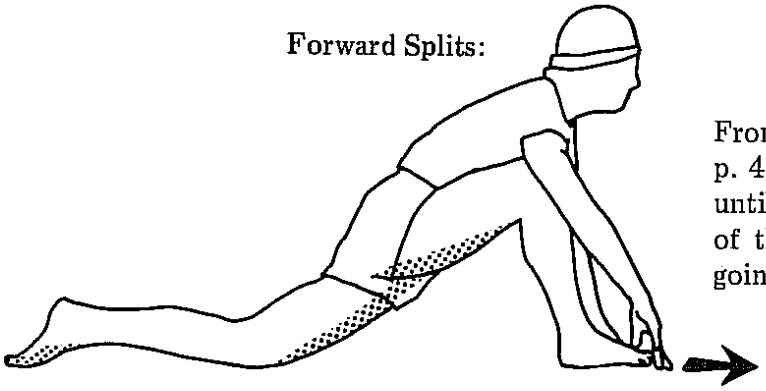


To stretch one leg at a time, sit on the corner of the mat in a comfortable position. Turn to face one foot and bend forward from the hips in that direction. Reach down with your hands and hold some place on your leg which gives you an easy stretch. Think of your chin going toward or just beyond your knee, even though it may not. Relax. Sit up and stretch the other leg in the same way. Stretch your tightest leg first. If necessary, put a towel around the bottom of your foot to help you stretch. Hold an easy stretch 30 seconds. No bouncing. This is good for the hamstrings and lower back.

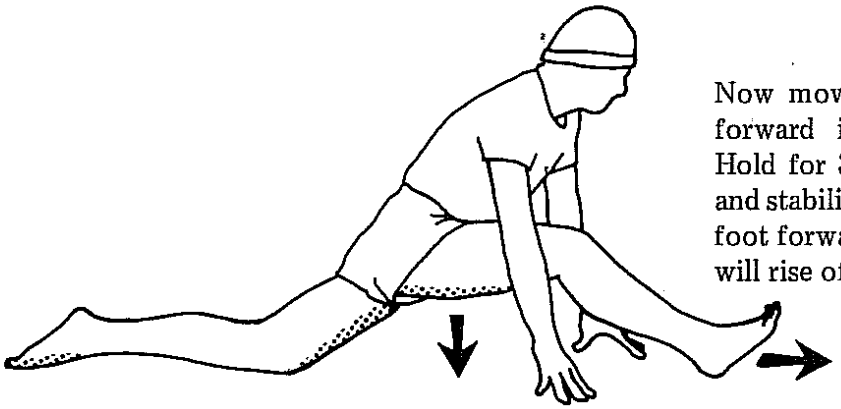
LEARNING THE SPLITS

This section is for a limited number of people. Unless you are training for gymnastics, dance, or need this extreme flexibility (such as an ice hockey goalkeeper, or a first baseman, or a ballet dancer) the other sections in this book should handle most of your stretching needs. I'm not trying to discourage you, but for everyday living, being able to do the splits is hardly necessary!

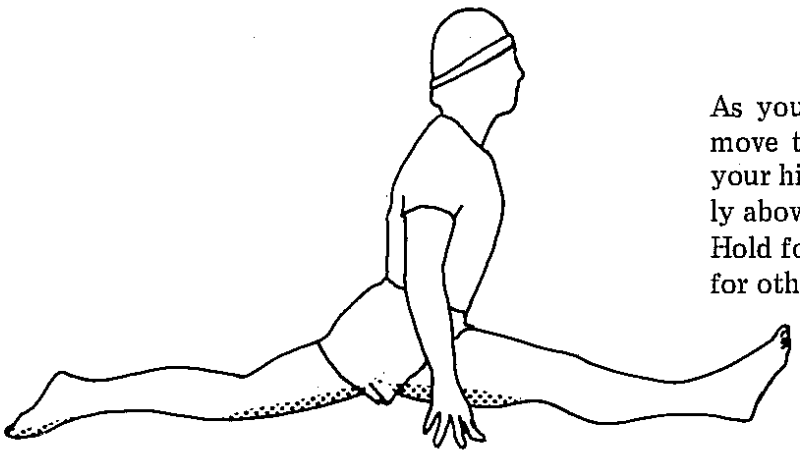
Forward Splits:



From the stretch position described on p. 48, slowly move your front foot forward until you feel a controlled stretch in the back of the legs and groin. Think of your hips going straight down. Hold for 30 seconds.



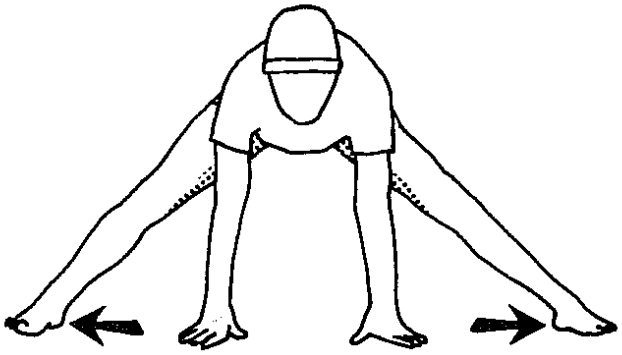
Now move your front foot a little farther forward into the developmental stretch. Hold for 30 seconds. Use hands for balance and stability. The farther you move the front foot forward, the more the sole of your foot will rise off the floor.



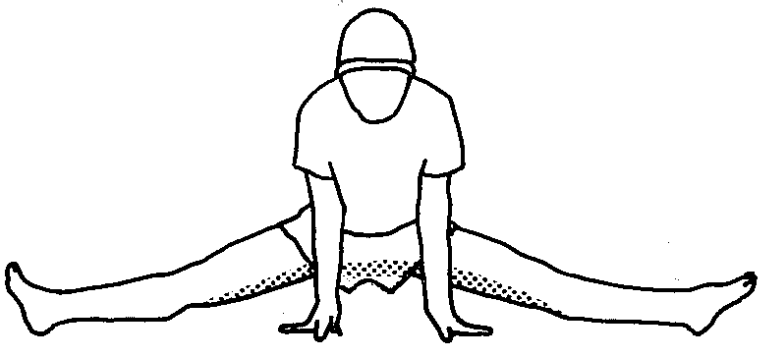
As you become more flexible, continue to move the front foot forward as you lower your hips downward. Keep shoulders directly above hips as back is kept vertical.
Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat these stretches for other side.

Learning to do the splits takes time and regularity. Be sure not to overstretch. Let your body gradually adapt to the changes needed to comfortably accomplish the splits. Do not be in a rush at the expense of injury.

Side Splits:



From a standing position with feet pointed straight ahead, gradually spread legs until you feel a stretch on the inside of your upper legs. Think of your hips going straight down. Use hands for balance. Hold an easy stretch for at least 30 seconds.



As you become more limber, keep moving your feet apart until the desired stretch is created. As you get lower in this stretch, keep your feet upright, with your heels on the floor: this will keep the stretch feeling on the inside of the upper legs and the extreme tension off the ligaments of the knee. (If you keep your feet flat on the floor there is a possibility of overstretching the inside ligament of the knees.) Hold for 30 seconds. As your body gradually adapts, slowly increase the stretch by lowering your hips down a bit further. *Be careful of overstretching.*

Doing the stretches on p. 91 and p. 96 will help you in learning the splits.

