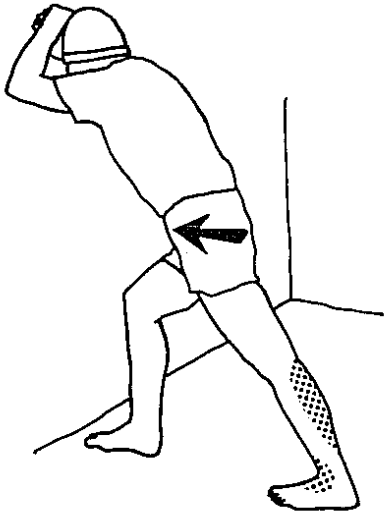
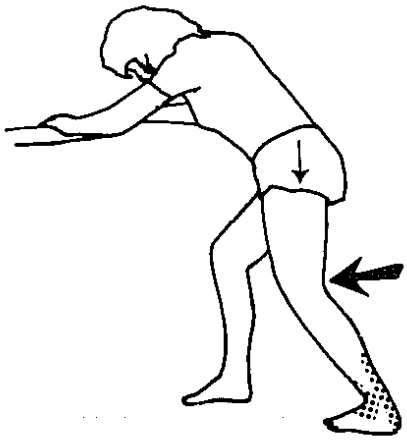
STANDING STRETCHES FOR LEGS AND HIPS

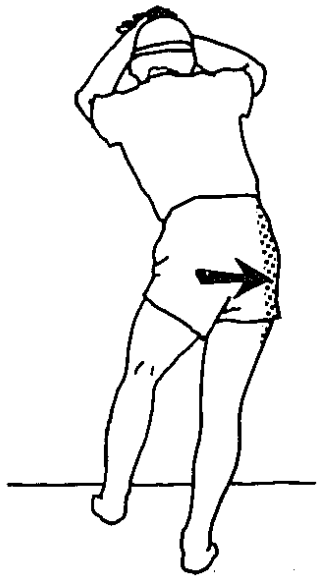
This series of stretches will help your walking and running. It will give flexibility and energy to the legs. All of the stretches can be done standing up.



To stretch your calf, stand a little ways from a solid support and lean on it with your forearms, head resting on hands. Bend one leg and place your foot on the ground in front of you, with the other leg straight behind. Slowly move your hips forward, keeping your lower back flat. Be sure to keep the heel of the straight leg on the ground, with toes pointed straight ahead or slightly turned in as you hold the stretch. Hold an easy stretch for 30 seconds. Do not bounce. Stretch other leg.

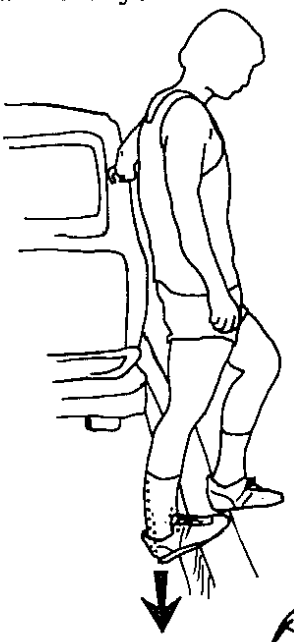


To create a stretch for the calf and Achilles tendon, lower your hips downward as you slightly bend your knee. Be sure to keep your back flat. Your back foot should be slightly toed-in or straight ahead during the stretch. Keep your heel down. This stretch is good for developing ankle flexibility. Hold stretch 25 seconds. The Achilles tendon area needs only a *slight feeling of stretch*.



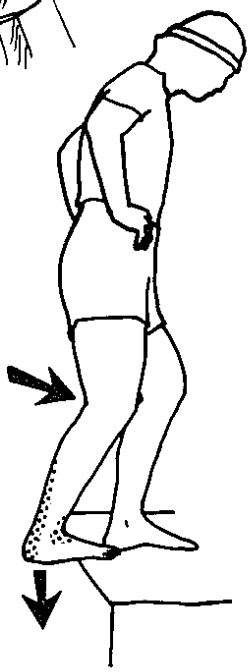
To stretch the outside of the hip, start from the same position as in the calf stretch. Stretch the right side of your hip by slightly turning your right hip to the inside. Project the side of your right hip to the side as you lean your shoulders very slightly in the opposite direction of your hips. Hold an even stretch for 25 seconds. Do both sides. Keep foot of back leg pointed straight ahead with heel flat on ground.

The Achilles tendon and ankle may be stretched several ways. I have already discussed using a wall for support and the Achilles tendon stretch from the toe pointer position (see p. 47). If you want to stretch this area further you can use a curb or the stairs.

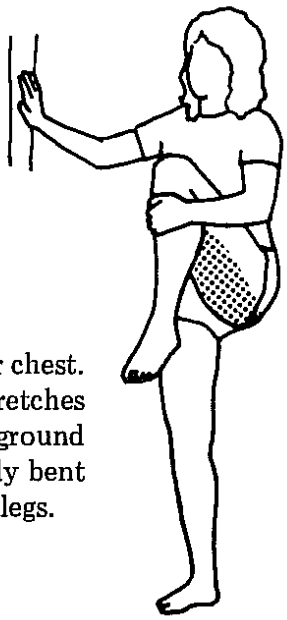


Place the ball of your foot on the edge of a curb or stair, with the rest of the foot hanging down over the edge. Lower the heel below the level of the stair or curb. Go slowly and work on balance. You may need to hold on to the stair railing or a car for balance. The leg of the Achilles tendon and ankle being stretched should be kept straight. Stretch in the easy phase only. Hold for 20 seconds.

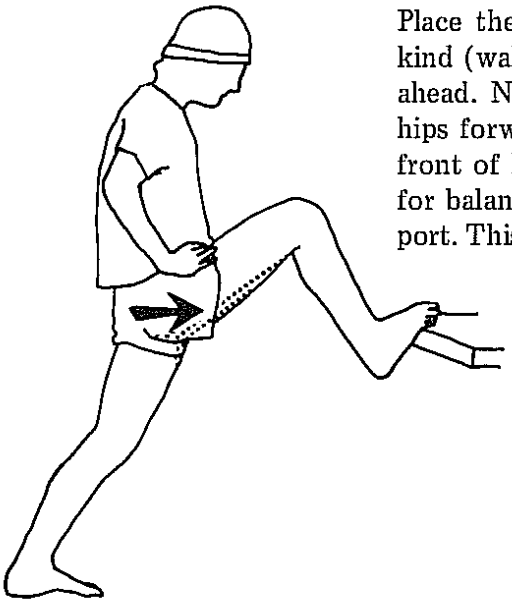
Also do the stretch with your knee slightly bent to change the stretch feeling to a higher part of the Achilles tendon.



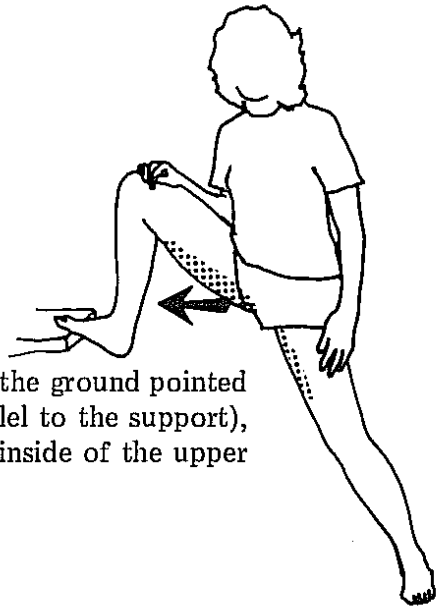
This is a good stretch to do after a hard workout or when the calves and Achilles tendons feel extremely tight. It can be done practically anywhere and adds some life to the lower legs.



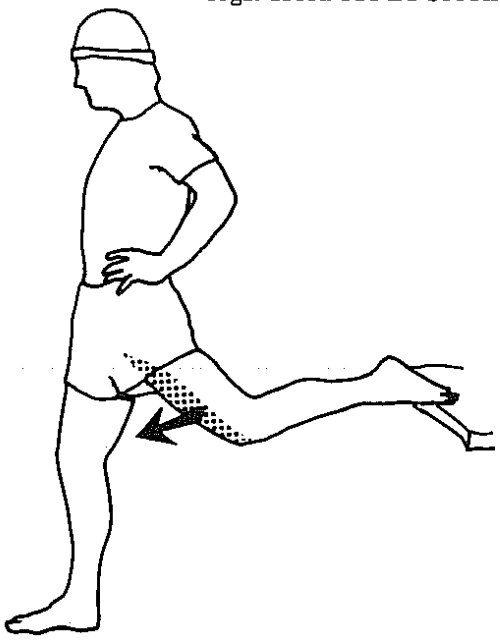
Hold on to something and pull your knee toward your chest. Do not lean forward at the waist or hips. This gently stretches your upper hamstrings, butt, and hips. The foot on the ground should be pointed straight ahead with the knee slightly bent (1 inch). Hold an easy stretch for 30 seconds. Do both legs.

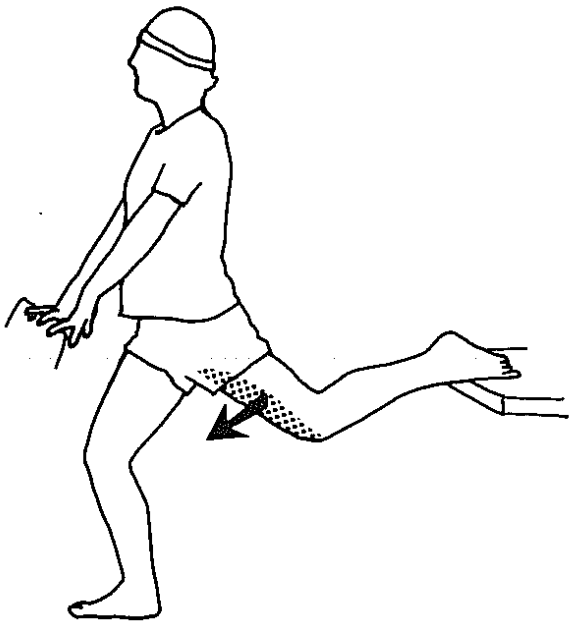


Place the ball of your foot up on a secure support of some kind (wall, fence, table). Keep the down leg pointed straight ahead. Now bend the knee of the up leg as you move your hips forward. This should stretch your groin, hamstrings, and front of hip. Hold for 30 seconds. Do both sides. If possible, for balance and control, use your hands to hold on to the support. This stretch will make it easier to lift your knees.

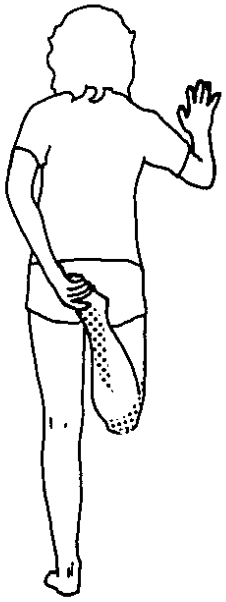


Variation: Instead of having the foot on the ground pointed straight ahead, turn it to the side (parallel to the support), then stretch as above. This stretches the inside of the upper legs. Hold for 25 seconds.

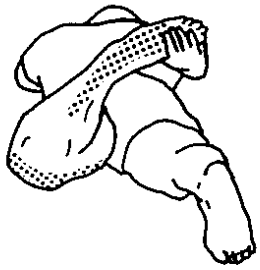




Extend your foot in back of you, setting the top of it on a table, fence or bar behind you at a comfortable height. Think of pulling your leg through (moving your leg forward) from the front of your hip to create a stretch for the front of the hip (*iliopsoas*) and quadriceps. Flex your butt (*gluteus*) muscles as you do this stretch. Keep the down knee slightly bent (1 inch) and upper body vertical. The foot on the ground should be pointed straight ahead. You can change the stretch by slightly bending the knee of the supporting leg a little more. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds. Learn to feel balanced and comfortable in this stretch through relaxed practice.

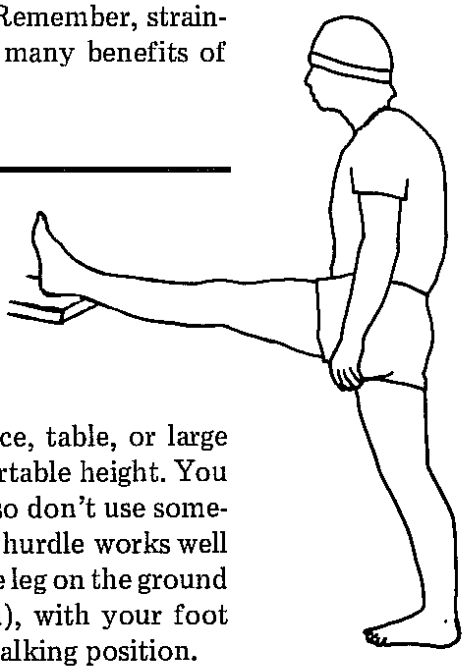


To stretch the quad and knee, hold the top of your *right* foot with your *left* hand and gently pull your heel toward your buttocks. The knee bends at a natural angle when you hold your foot with the opposite hand. This is good to use in knee rehabilitation and with problem knees. Hold for 30 seconds, each leg.

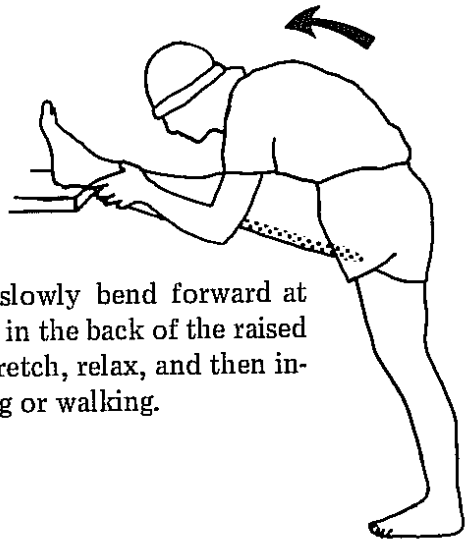


A variation of this stretch can be done lying on your stomach. Be sure to stretch without pain. Reach behind you with your hand and hold the top of your opposite foot between the ankle joint and toes. Gently pull your heel toward the middle of your buttocks. Hold 8-12 seconds.

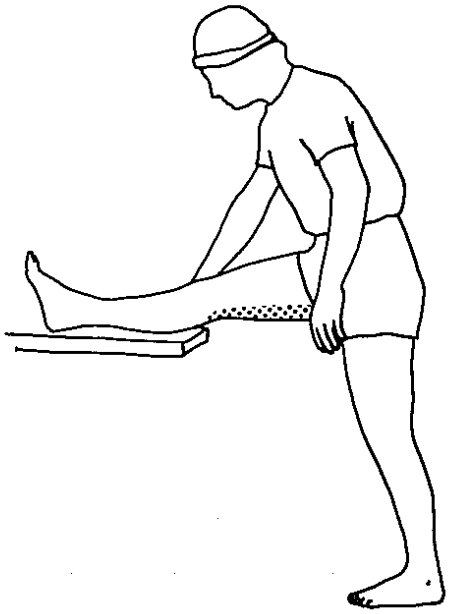
Remember to stretch under control. Start in a place that is fairly easy and go from there. Improvement and results will occur faster if you go from an easy stretch to a developmental stretch. Let yourself limber up slowly. Remember, straining will keep you from fully realizing the many benefits of stretching.



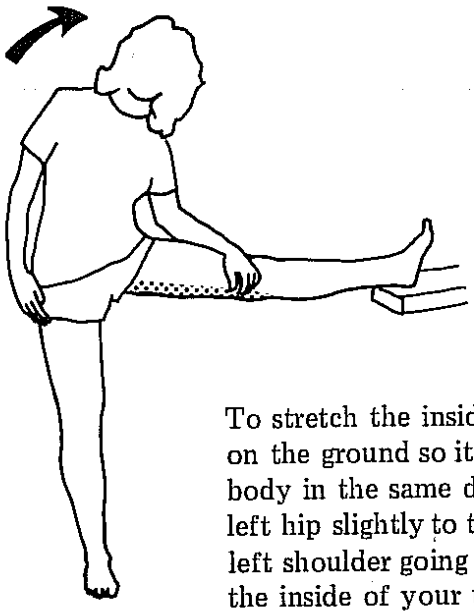
Place the back of your heel on a tree, fence, table, or large rock which is about waist high or at a comfortable height. You want to keep the leg that is raised straight, so don't use something that is too high. If you are at a track, a hurdle works well because it is usually adjustable in height. The leg on the ground should be slightly bent at the knee (1 inch), with your foot pointed forward as in a proper running or walking position.



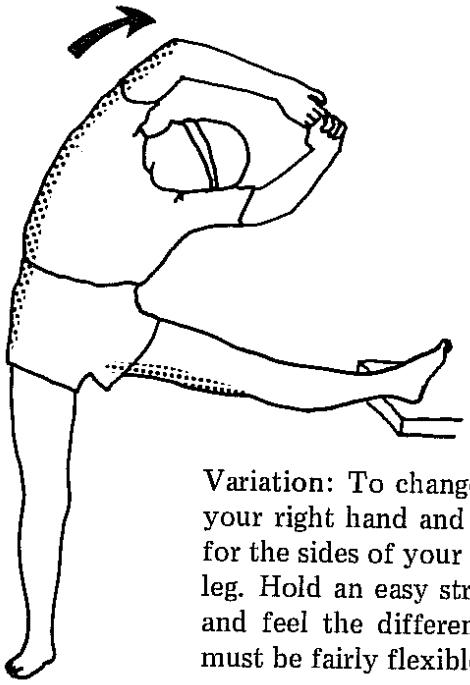
Now, while looking straight ahead, slowly bend forward at the waist until you feel a good stretch in the back of the raised leg. Hold and relax. Find the easy stretch, relax, and then increase it. This is very good for running or walking.



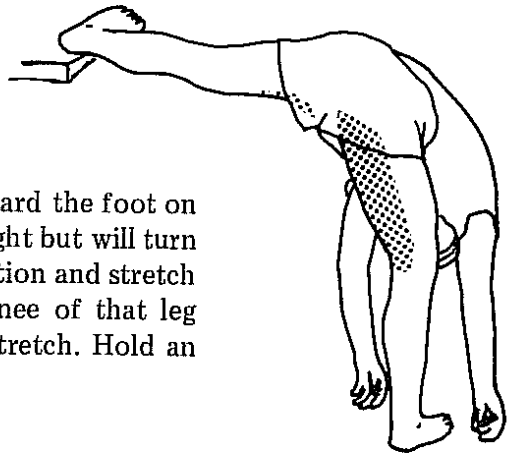
Variation: If you cannot easily touch your toes, rest more of your leg up on a table or platform of some kind that is at a comfortable height for you. Then you will be able to use the side of the table or ledge for balance and support as you get the right feeling of stretch in the hamstrings.



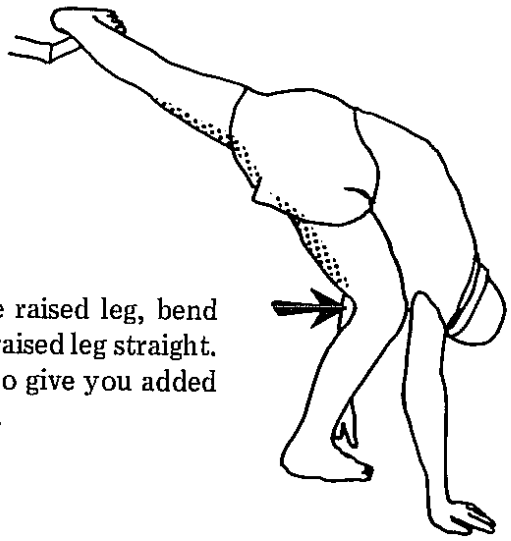
To stretch the inside of your raised leg, turn the foot that is on the ground so it is parallel to the support. Face your upper body in the same direction as your down foot and turn your left hip slightly to the inside. Slowly bend sideways with your left shoulder going toward your left knee. This should stretch the inside of your upper leg. Hold an easy stretch for 15 seconds and a developmental stretch for 20 seconds. Be sure to keep the knee of the down leg slightly bent. Do both legs.



Variation: To change the stretch, use your left hand to pull your right hand and arm up and over your head. This is good for the sides of your upper body and the inside of your raised leg. Hold an easy stretch for 15 seconds. Do both sides. See and feel the difference in each side. To do this stretch you must be fairly flexible.

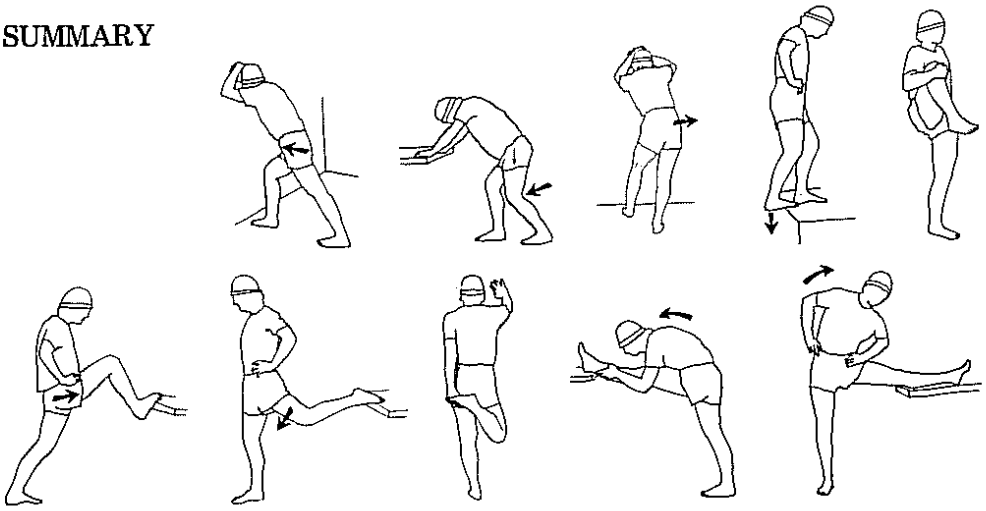


To change the stretch, bend at the waist toward the foot on the ground. The raised leg should remain straight but will turn to the inside as you bend over. Hold this position and stretch the hamstrings of the supporting leg. The knee of that leg should be slightly bent (1 inch) during the stretch. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds.



If you want to stretch the groin area of the raised leg, bend the knee of the supporting leg and keep the raised leg straight. If you can, rest your hands on the ground to give you added balance. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds.

SUMMARY



It is important to maintain good flexibility throughout our lives, so that as we get older we can avoid the problems that go with stiff joints, tight muscles and bad posture. One of the striking characteristics of aging is the loss of range of motion, and stretching is perhaps the single most important thing you can do to keep your body limber.