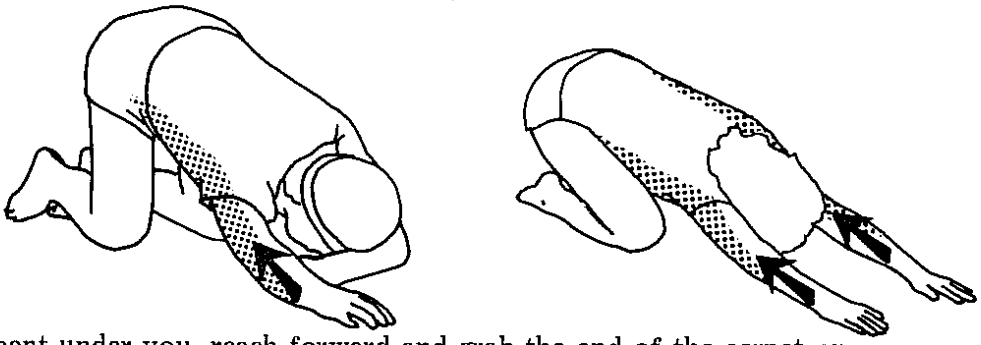
STRETCHES FOR THE BACK, SHOULDERS, AND ARMS:

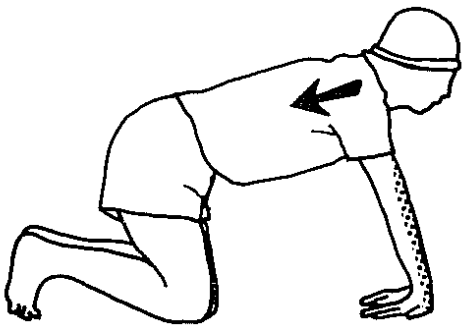
Many people suffer from tension in the upper body because of the mental stress of modern living. Quite a few muscular athletes are stiff in the upper body because of not stretching that area.

There are many stretches that can reduce tension and increase flexibility in the upper body. Most of them can be done anywhere.

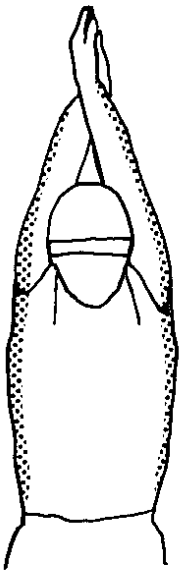


With legs bent under you, reach forward and grab the end of the carpet or mat. If you can't grab on to something, just pull back with straight arms while you press down slightly with your palms.

You can do this stretch one arm at a time or both at the same time. Pulling with just one arm provides more control and isolates the stretch on either side. You should feel this in your shoulders, arms, lats (*latissimus dorsi*) or sides, upper back, and even your lower back. When you do this for the first time you may only feel it in the shoulders and arms, but as you do it more you will learn to stretch other areas. By slightly moving your hips in either direction you can increase or decrease the stretch. Don't strain. Be relaxed. Hold for 15 seconds.

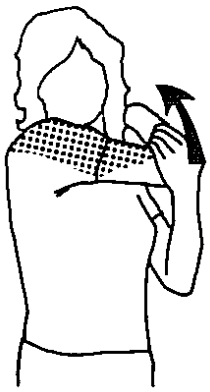


A Forearm and Wrist Stretch: Start on all fours. Support yourself on your hands and knees. Thumbs should be pointed to the outside with fingers pointed toward knees. Keep palms flat as you lean back to stretch the front part of your forearms. Hold an easy stretch for 20 seconds. Relax, then stretch again. You may find you are very tight in this area.

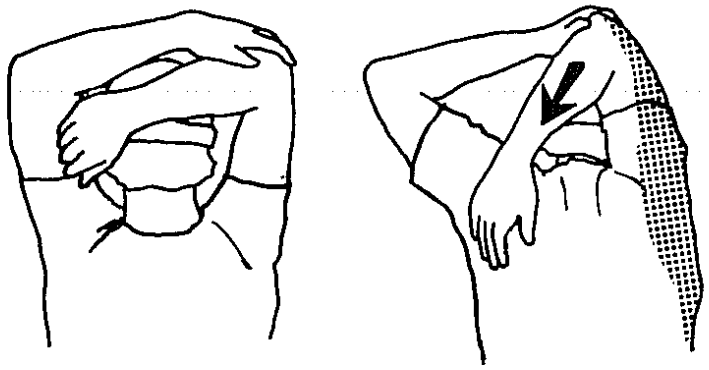


With arms extended overhead and palms together as drawing shows, stretch arms upward and slightly backwards. Breathe in as you stretch upward, holding the stretch for 5-8 seconds.

This is a great stretch for the muscles of the outer portions of the arms, shoulders, and ribs. It can be done any time and any place to relieve tension and create a feeling of relaxation and well-being.

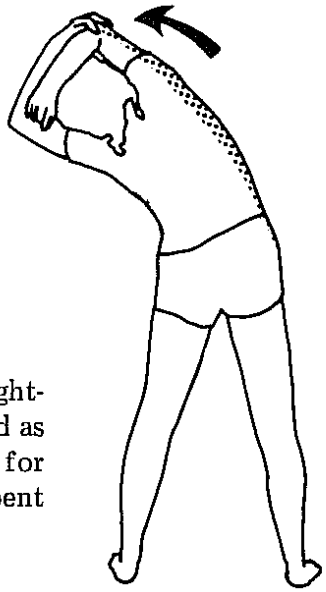


To stretch your shoulder and middle of upper back, gently pull your elbow across your chest toward your opposite shoulder. Hold stretch for 10 seconds.

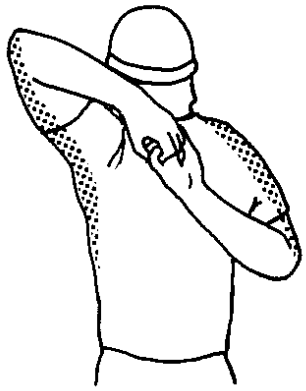


Here is a simple stretch for your triceps and the top of your shoulders. With arms overhead, hold the elbow of one arm with the hand of the other arm. Gently pull the elbow behind your head, creating a stretch. Do it slowly. Hold for 15 seconds. Do not use drastic force to limber up.

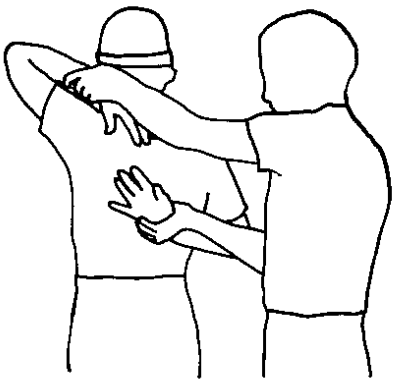
Stretch both sides. Does it feel like one side is a lot tighter than the other side? This is a good way to begin loosening up your arms and shoulders. You can do this stretch while walking.



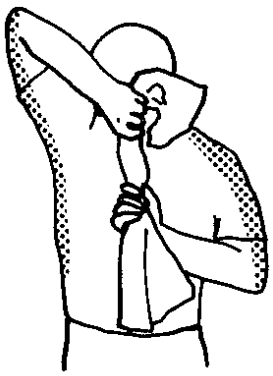
Variation: From a standing position, with your knees slightly bent (1 inch), gently pull your elbow behind your head as you bend from your hips to the side. Hold an easy stretch for 10 seconds. Do both sides. Keeping your knees slightly bent will give you better balance while you stretch.



Another Shoulder Stretch: Reach behind your head and down as far as you can with your left hand and, if you are able, grab your right hand coming up, palm out. Grab fingers and hold. Many will not be able to do this stretch without help. Hold only as long as fairly comfortable. If your hands do not meet, try one of these:



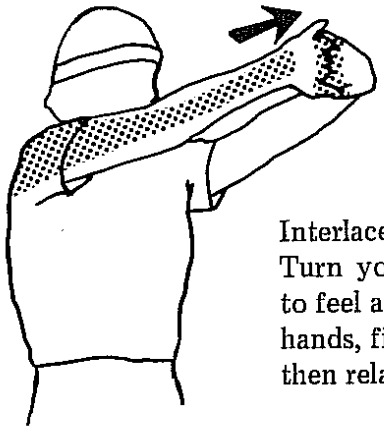
Have someone pull your hands slowly toward each other until you get an easy stretch and hold it. Do not stretch too far. You may get a great stretch without having your fingers touching. Stretch within *your* limits.



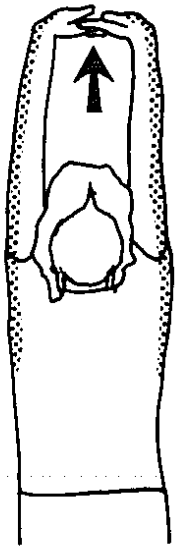
OR

Drop a towel behind your head. With your upper arm bent, reach up with your other arm to hold on to the end of the towel. Gradually move your hand up on the towel, pulling your upper arm down, until your hands are touching.

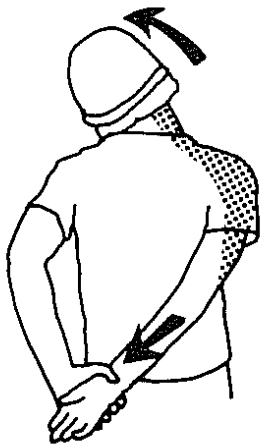
Work a little on it every day and get a good stretch. After a while you will be able to do this stretch without help. It reduces tension and increases flexibility. It also acts as an upper body revitalizer when you are tired.



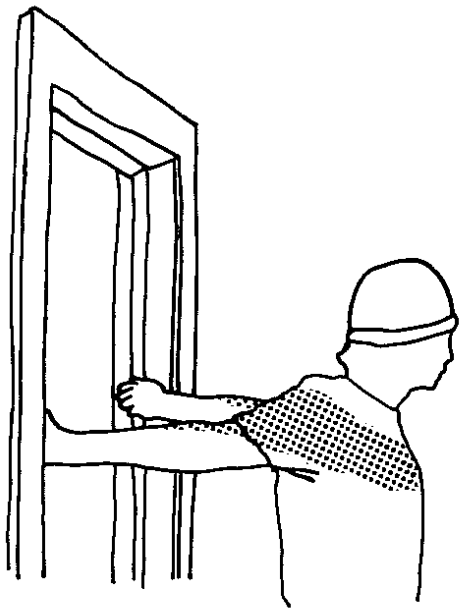
Interlace your fingers out in front of you at shoulder height. Turn your palms outward as you extend your arms forward to feel a stretch in your shoulders, middle of upper back, arms, hands, fingers, and wrists. Hold an easy stretch for 15 seconds, then relax and repate.



Interlace your fingers above your head. Now, with your palms facing upward, push your arms slightly back and up. Feel the stretch in arms, shoulders, and upper back. Hold stretch for 15 seconds. Do not hold your breath. This stretch is good to do anywhere, anytime. Excellent for slumping shoulders.

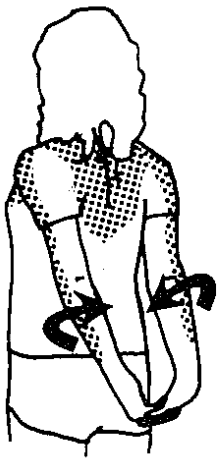


To stretch the side of your neck and top of shoulder, lean your head sideways toward your left shoulder as your left hand pulls your right arm down and across, behind your back. Hold an easy stretch for 10 seconds. Do both sides. This stretch can be done sitting on the floor, in a chair, or while standing.

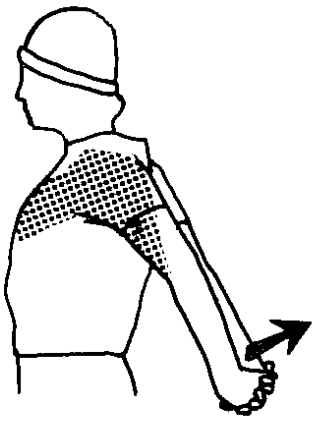


Another stretch is to hold on to a fence or both sides of a doorway with your hands behind you at about shoulder level. Let your arms straighten as you lean forward. Hold your chest up and chin in.

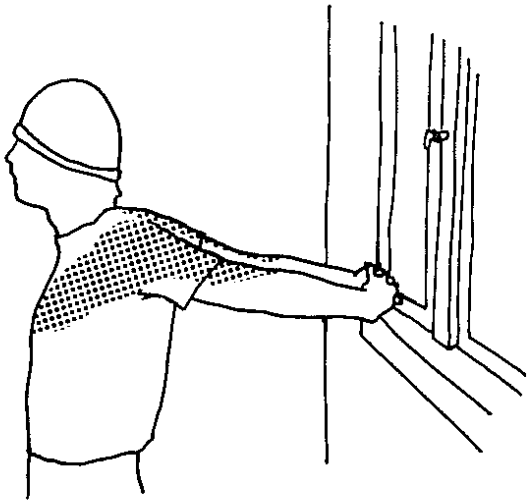
The next stretches are done with your fingers interlaced behind your back.



For the first stretch, slowly turn your elbows inward while straightening your arms.

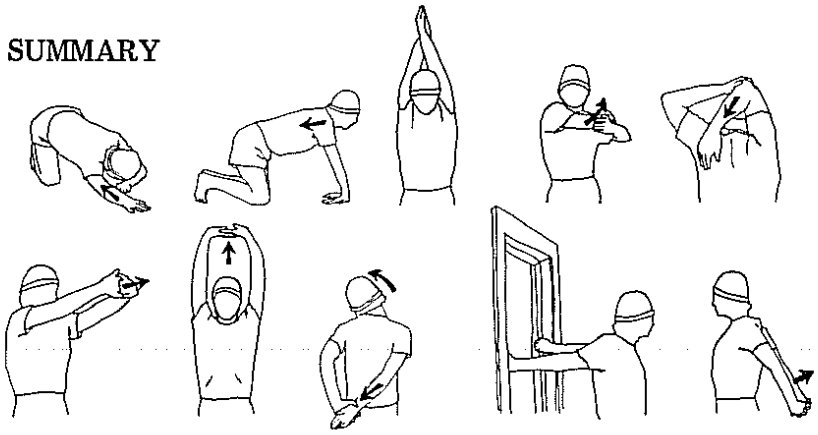


If that is fairly easy, then lift your arms up behind you until you feel a stretch in the arms, shoulders or chest. Hold an easy stretch for 5-15 seconds. This is good to do when you find yourself slumping forward from the shoulders. Keep your chest out and chin in. This stretch can be done any time.



To further stretch your chest and shoulders, bring your arms up behind you, keeping your arms and back straight, without tilting forward. Rest your hands on something for support. As you take a few steps away from the object and straighten your arms you will increase the stretch. *Do not overstretch.* This is great for rounded shoulders and gives an immediate feeling of energy.

SUMMARY



It is better to understretch than to overstretch. Always be at a point where you can stretch further, and never at a point where you have gone as far as you can go.