

Flexibility: A must at every age

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(HealthDay)—Flexibility is a component of all types of movement—from everyday activities to the most rigorous exercises. Being flexible helps you stay mobile and avoid injury.

Yet [flexibility](#) training often gets lost in the shuffle or pushed to the bottom of the list after cardio and [strength training](#).

Its [goal](#) is to increase your range of motion—how far you can reach when, for instance, you bend from side to side, or raise your arm overhead to grab an item from a high shelf.

Flexibility is best achieved through [static stretching](#), which are stretches you ease into and hold for 10 to 30 seconds while inhaling and exhaling—no bouncing, no holding your breath.

As you start a stretch, focus mentally on the muscles you're targeting. Extend just to the point of discomfort; you shouldn't feel any pain.

Here are three moves that target the lower body.

For your hamstrings, sit on the floor with your legs straight in front of you. Think of your hips as a hinge and, with a straight back, lower your chest toward your thighs until you feel the stretch in the backs of your thighs. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

For your hips, stand up straight, facing a sturdy chair or table in case you need it for support. Raise the heel of your right foot behind you and use your right hand to press it toward your backside without moving your thigh or your hip out of alignment. Repeat 3 to 5 times, then switch legs and repeat.

For your calves, step forward with your right leg. Keep your left heel flat on the ground and press your left hip forward as you redistribute your weight over your right leg. Repeat 3 to 5 times, then switch legs and repeat.

Note: It's important that muscles are warm before you do static stretches.

They're a great follow-up after every [cardio workout](#), but do at least 2 or 3 focused sessions per week, targeting all muscle groups, and always after a minimum of 10 minutes of light activity.

More information: The American Council on Exercise has more about [increasing flexibility](#), along with other exercises you can do on your own.

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