

Stretches for calves, hamstrings and quads

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(HealthDay)—Stretching your leg muscles can improve your flexibility and prevent injury. Here are three stretches that you can do every day and at every age.

Start with a calf [stretch](#). Stand at arm's length from a wall and place your palms flat on the wall at shoulder height for support. Now take one big step backward with one leg. Keep that leg straight as you bend the front knee. Lean forward, but keep your back heel planted firmly on the floor. You should feel the stretch in your lower leg. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then switch legs and repeat. Repeat three to five times with each leg.

Now move to a hamstring stretch. Lie flat on your back and extend one leg straight up to the ceiling. Loop an exercise band around the ball of that [foot](#) and hold the ends of the band firmly around both hands. Now pull on the band to create tension, drawing your foot slightly toward your head. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then switch legs and repeat. Repeat three to five times with each leg.

Finish with a quad stretch. Stand a few feet in front of a step or low stool. Extend one leg behind you so that you are resting that foot on the step. Bend your front knee slightly without letting it extend beyond your toes. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then switch legs and repeat. Repeat three to five times with each leg.

For safety, never bounce when stretching. This can cause muscles to tighten and lead to injury. Ease into every stretch with slow, steady movement. And only stretch a warm body—after a workout is perfect. But if you're not working out, a few minutes of walking is enough of a prep.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Aging has a guide to [stretches](#) for every part of the body.

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