

Patty's PT Tips

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Easy Stretching Exercises when Lying Down

How to Stretch

- Relaxed, sustained stretch with your attention focused on the muscles to be stretched
- No Bouncing! Do not create pain!
- Easy Stretch-10 to 30 seconds Mild tension, **Relax** as you hold the stretch. The feeling of tension should ease as you hold the stretch
- Breathing-should be slow and rhythmical. DO NOT hold your breath
- Counting- when initiating a stretching program silently count slowly to learn timing and rhythm. Over time your body will develop a sense of appropriate time and feel

The Stretch Reflex

This is a protective mechanism. Any time you stretch the muscle fibers too far a nerve reflex responds by sending a signal to the muscles to contract-- this keeps the muscle from being injured. Therefore, when you stretch too far, you tighten the very muscles you are trying to stretch. This can cause microscopic tearing of the muscle fibers and formation of scar tissue. The result decreases the elasticity of the muscle.

Sequencing of a Stretching Program

Position yourself comfortably to allow the spine to relax and decompress. This may require towel rolls under the neck, upper arms, knees or even a folded towel in the hollow of your low back.

Breathing-start with 5 diaphragmatic breaths. Let ribs, neck and pelvic floor relax with the inhale. Draw the pelvic floor up and pull the belly button in with the exhale. Breathe in 5 counts, breathe out for 5.

Start from the top and work your way down

- a. Chin tuck (head press)-lengthen back of neck, press the back of head into the bed or pillow. Hold 5 counts/ relax 5/repeat 5 times
- b. Arm lengthener-maintain chin tuck, arms at sides. Lengthen arms and pull shoulder blades together and down hold 5 counts/relax 5 counts/ repeat 5x. Then you can stretch arms overhead-either one at a time or together. It may feel better to alternate arms.
- c. Single Knee to chest-you may need a strap under the thigh to assist. 3 repetitions on each leg. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Draw pelvic floor up and pull belly button in when raising and lowering the leg. Breathe normally during the stretch.
- d. Double Knee to chest-same technique as the single but bring knees up and lower one leg at a time to reduce mechanical stress on low back and pelvic girdle
- e. "Morning stretches"-see additional handout. This can help you find your tight spots. It's a good all-around stretch to improve postural alignment.
- f. Pelvic Clock- with both knees bent-slowly rock pelvis around the numbers of a clock face if the clock was laying on your lower belly. Move slowly, smoothly, clockwise and counter clockwise 5 times in each direction. Pay attention to breathing rhythmically.
- g. Lower Back and side stretch-see additional handout
- h. "The Sphinx" then moving into a "Cobra" position if tolerable. No low back pain or radiating pain into buttocks or legs!! See additional handout.
- i. Hamstring stretch on wall-see handout. You may need help with this one. I prefer to do hamstrings and calf muscles sitting or standing. It's easier to get into position.

Daily stretching is key with managing your symptoms. It keeps the spastic muscles from “setting up housekeeping” and developing contractures. Movement of all kinds can improve a muscle’s elasticity.