

Athletic Stretching Vol. 1 Guide

I've seen thousands of clients at Stretch HTX. Many come in with the very same complaints about pain, stiffness and physical performance. And while bodies and lives have an infinite variety, the causes of aches and pains, along with the methods for correcting them, follow pretty similar patterns. With the right mobility training, performed consistently over a long enough period of time, many of the common joint and muscle issues can be fixed.

The Purpose of Athletic Stretching Vol. 1

My goal is and has always been to help more people get out of pain and feel better in their bodies. However my ability to help people in person is constrained by time availability and a person's proximity to me. So I've created the Athletic Stretching program and this guide, so anyone can begin to understand and take control of their own body.

Athletic Stretching Vol. 1 contains:

- 48 instructional videos that clearly show and verbally instruct you how to do each exercise.
- These 48 videos are divided into three sections: Myofascial Stretching, Joint Mobility Drills and Breathing Exercises.
- The myofascial stretches and joint mobility drills are further separated by the part of the body each exercise focuses on: Leg and Foot, Spine and Pelvis, Arm and Hand, Neck and Head.
- This makes it easy to find the right exercise for whichever part of the body you'd like to focus on.

There's also 4 bonus videos: two Foot Strengthening exercises and two Vision Training exercises. While you're not going to hear much talk in your typical gym about strong feet and well trained eyes, these overlooked areas are vital to your overall well being. Don't make the mistake of ignoring these critical parts any longer. Practice these bonus exercises regularly and you'll be shocked at the bodywide effects you'll experience.

The 52 easy to perform breathing exercises, joint mobility drills, and myofascial stretches in Athletic Stretching Vol. 1 are some of the most powerful that I've found at increasing flexibility, improving posture, reducing or eliminating pain, and boosting energy. In short, we're going to get your body moving and feeling better than it has in years.

Moving more efficiently with fewer compensations and less muscular tension will guarantee your body stays flexible, strong and resilient over the course of your lifetime.

What is Myofascia

Fascia is the body's main support structure. Researcher TW Findlay (2009), defined fascia as:

the soft-tissue component of the connective tissue system that permeates the human body, forming a continuous, whole-body, three-dimensional matrix of structural support. It interpenetrates and surrounds all organs, muscles, bones, and nerve fibers, creating a unique environment for body systems functioning.

Fascia is especially found wherever your body needs to be more stable, or needs to absorb a lot of impact. Examples are the plantar fascia on the bottom of your foot, the thoracolumbar fascia covering your low back, and the IT band that runs along the outside of your thigh.

But fascia isn't very elastic, and becomes even less so as we age. If we're not constantly moving our bodies in varied ways, thick myofascia gets laid down anywhere that's been stagnant for too long — which makes those areas even less flexible and harder to move.

You will also notice a massive upgrade to your daily energy and stamina. Most of us are walking around with dozens of compressed joints and areas with chronic muscular tension. This saps us of energy, which leads to a near constant feeling of fatigue. Trying to make it through the day while carrying around all that tension is like driving hard with one foot on the brake. You'll eventually get to your destination, but you're going to waste a ton of fuel and wear out some important parts in the process. Athletic Stretching will teach you how to finally let go of the brake that's dragging down your body and vitality.

The primary purpose of Athletic Stretching (indeed what should be the purpose for every form of therapy, rehab or physical training) is one thing:

To Improve the Way You Move.

This will be accomplished in a few ways. First, we'll improve your breathing. Second, we'll help you become mindful of your posture and gradually improve it. Next, we'll work on a neurological level to rewire your brain and rewrite your movement 'programs' by focusing on your joints. And last, we'll remodel your soft tissue (myofascia) for long term flexibility with the right kind of stretching. This will allow your neurological, physiological and structural systems to work optimally and harmoniously for a lifetime.

Be warned! Profound changes like these do not occur overnight. So be consistent, patient and persistent with what's in Athletic Stretching, and you will be amazed at how great your body will feel every day. No matter your age.

It takes a long time to remodel once you do start changing your movement habits — around 200 days for connective tissue (myofascia) to be completely remodelled. This means that you must be patient and persistent with your new mobility regiment. You may start to *feel* better rather quickly, but that doesn't mean your mobility regiment can stop there. You have to keep going to make these immediate changes permanent. Your body needs enough time for the structural changes to occur that ensure the tissue being remodelled is supple and flexible.

This is vital nowadays since modern life has us doing the same movements in almost the same exact positions day in and day out. Some muscles get tight from overuse, while others get weak from underuse, and fascia is layered on top making things even stiffer. Postural and movement imbalances like these wreak havoc on our joints and are the cause of muscle tension and many chronic aches and pains.

Why Joint Mobility

Beyond stretching muscles and fascia, focusing on the joints can have an immediate and profound effect on your flexibility and overall movement capacity. A joint mobility drill, quite simply, involves taking specific joints through their full range of motion in a controlled and precise manner.

Joints are like little GPS satellites for your brain. They communicate to your brain about where your body is in space and how it's moving. This is part of your proprioceptive system, which is a major foundation for all movement and posture. The signal quality travelling from your joints to your central nervous system (spinal cord and brain) is dependent on the condition of each joint.

Joints that haven't been moved in a long time, are injured, or are compressed and 'closed,' make the signal fuzzy. This causes the brain to reflexively tighten and weaken the surrounding muscles to protect the area.

To ensure the signals are crystal clear and accurate, while also maintaining joint structure integrity, you need to mobilize your joints daily.

Doing joint mobility drills won't just improve your flexibility and muscle function. It can also have a fantastic effect on your balance. Since your proprioceptive system greatly influences your body's ability to react to the environment (via information coming from your joints), clearing up the signal will help improve all aspects of your movement — including your balance. It goes without saying that doing things to improve balance are paramount as we age.

If you've ever missed a step going down the stairs and had your body instantaneously respond to keep you from falling, almost before you even knew what was happening, that was your proprioceptive system responding.

The faster and clearer the signals flowing from your many joints are, the faster and more effectively your brain and muscles can respond to keep you balanced. If you only remember one neurological principle about joints, remember this:

Closed joints (from injury or disuse) result in stiffness and weakness.

Open joints (from precise joint mobilization) result in strength and flexibility.

In addition to the neurological reason for mobilizing your joints, it's also important for their physical health. Every time you mobilize a joint it is bathed in fresh synovial fluid from the tiny space within the joint capsule. Which nourishes and heals your joint by transporting the molecular building blocks necessary for joint repair and maintenance.

Athletic Stretching shows you how to keep your joints healthy and your brain happy in just a few minutes a day.

The Power of Breathing Drills

You may assume because you're alive that you're breathing just fine. But you would be incorrect.

Many people use dysfunctional breathing patterns that have been habituated by long periods of sitting, asymmetrical movements built into everyday life, and living too often in a sympathetic nervous system state (AKA fight or flight).

Add to this the inherent asymmetries of our anatomy. For example the left lung is slightly smaller because it shares space with the heart, the liver is on the right side which affects diaphragm function.

Since the lungs and diaphragm are involved in every breath we take, all these factors obviously make a difference. And since we take somewhere between 15,000 and 30,000 breaths a day, that amounts to a huge impact on the entire physiology and neuromuscular system.

Most people don't realize that improper breathing patterns can be a big cause of common aches and pains, poor posture, and feeling fatigued or 'worn out' all the time. For example, if you use your secondary respiratory muscles (located in your neck and upper chest) to carry your breathing load, you probably suffer from chronic headaches, neck and shoulder tension and pain. This breathing style also increases feelings of stress, anxiety and body wide inflammation.

It's as simple as this: if you're breathing inefficiently you'll always have chronic muscle tension, mysterious aches and pains, and will generally feel more stressed and tired all the time. No matter how much yoga, massage and stretching you do.

The good news is that all this can be improved with the right kind of breath training. Restoring a healthy and balanced style of breathing is achieved by using the deep abdominal muscles for exhalation, especially the all important diaphragm. Along with optimal inhalation you'll be improving the motion and function of your rib cage and thoracic spine. Very important for posture and pain relief.

In addition to these deep abdominal muscles' role in respiration, they're also vital for stabilizing the hips and lower back. If you're one of the many that suffer chronic low back pain and have yet to find a solution, retraining these respiratory and lumbar stabilizing muscles may be the answer you've been searching for.

The breathing exercises in Athletic Stretching are some of the best for retraining your breathing patterns to become more balanced and efficient. You may notice that some of the breathing exercises (90-90 balloon breathing with right arm overhead and 90-90 balloon breathing with hip shift) are not done equally on both sides.

This is to correct for asymmetries in your anatomy and daily life. By inhibiting the overused muscle patterns on one side of the body, while activating the underused ones on the other side, it repositions your body into a more neutral state. This creates better alignment and allows your entire muscular system to function optimally.

In fact I strongly suggest you practice the balloon breathing exercises intensely for the first two months, before going on to one of the other breathing exercises. You may start with the 90-90 balloon breathing with right arm overhead for the first month. Then move to the 90-90 balloon breathing with hip shift the second month. Notice any changes with your body during these two months. If you're seeing a positive impact, you should continue practicing these on going.

Over time you will notice more flexibility, less muscle tension, and a more relaxed state of mind. All this just from retraining your breath! It's pretty powerful stuff.

For more information about balloon breathing exercises check out The Postural Restoration Institute (<http://www.posturalrestoration.com/>).

If you're a little nerdy and like reading science stuff, you can learn about the effects and rationale behind balloon breathing in a scientific paper here: *The Value of Blowing Up a Balloon*.

Neutral Stance Spinal Lengthening

You should begin every Athletic Stretching session with Neutral Stance Spinal Lengthening. To perform it, make sure both feet are facing straight ahead. Next root both heels into the ground while keeping the toes in contact. Then imagine a rope attached to the top of your head is being pulled up to the ceiling. Continue this sensation of being pulled up to the ceiling, while focusing on your alignment, from your heels up through your entire spine. Relax your shoulders and breathe. Maintain this alignment for 20–30 seconds.

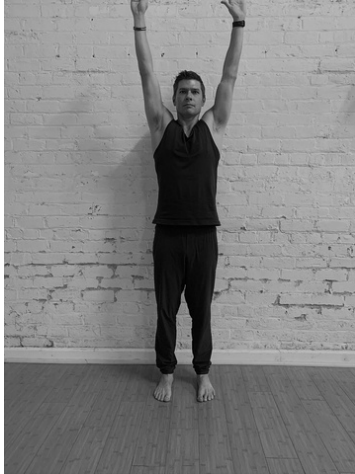
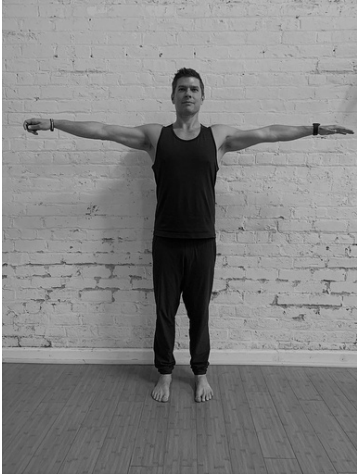


Correct Neutral Stance Lengthened Spine



Incorrect Neutral Stance Lengthened Spine

Once you've done this you can move through the alternate body positions shown on the next page. Check in with how your body feels after each.



Positions:

1. Arms to the Sides (push fingertips away from each other)
2. Arms Overhead (push fingertips to the ceiling)
3. Arms in Front (push fingertips forward)
4. Torso Rotated Left
5. Torso Rotated Right

Key Points:

- Begin in a relaxed neutral stance
- Sequentially move through each position demonstrated
- Focus on creating a lengthened aligned body

- Coordinate each position with breathing (as you inhale, lengthen your body and as you exhale return to the neutral stance with arms by your sides)
- Hold each position for 5–10 seconds
- Maintain a relaxed face, shoulders, abdomen and legs

Think of it as anti-gravity training for your body. It's deceptively simple but immensely important. While gravity constantly drags us down making us look like depressed cavemen, spinal lengthening creates an elongating effect on the entire body to create a tall, confident posture.

Practicing spinal lengthening regularly throughout the day 'resets' you into a better, more attractive and confident looking posture. It counteracts the tendency to slip into that ugly turtle head posture that comes from sitting and staring into a screen all day. Combine it with your joint mobility, stretching and breathing drills for a winning formula.

Stretching for Maximum Benefit

First let's clear up a big misconception about stretching. Pulling harder on a muscle **DOES NOT** result in 'lengthening' or loosening that muscle. We are not made of Play Doh.

Flexibility comes from the nervous system. Not the muscle itself. Therefore, flexibility is not something you can force on a muscle. It must be given, or allowed, by the nervous system. For this reason, the number one mistake many people make when stretching on their own, or being stretched by a partner, is going too intensely. The thinking is that if they're not grimacing and straining, it's not working. No pain no gain, right? Wrong!

Stretching to the point of pain only elicits the myotatic reflex — also known as the stretch reflex. If you're stretching or moving into pain, you're actually sending a threat signal to your nervous system. Which reflexively tells your muscles to tighten up. This is obviously counterproductive to what you're trying to accomplish while stretching! Which is to get the target area to relax.

To avoid this reflex, always keep the stretch intensity below a 5 out of 10. If you're used to the old-fashioned approach to stretching, where you usually hover around an intensity of 9 or 10, this may feel way too easy. But ask yourself where all that pain-faced stretching has gotten you. Are you moving better and feeling looser today because of it? My guess is, no.

The other major key to good stretching is to synchronize the movement with your breath. There's a reason yoga has such a deep focus on breath. It's because the simple act of breathing has huge ramifications on your entire body, and especially your muscles. To give you an example of how your breath can influence your muscles, we'll do a range of motion test. With your knees soft, bend forward and reach for the floor. Perform a few reps to see where you're at.

Now, stand up and take a big inhale and hold it in. While holding your breath, reach for the floor again. Probably a lot less range and it felt tighter, right?

The way we breathe dictates what our muscles do. Short, shallow breaths or breath holding creates muscle tension. Deep, slow breaths aid muscle relaxation. For this reason, I usually suggest counting breaths instead of time while stretching. This guarantees you're not making the mistake of holding your breath and creating excess muscle tension. The best way to synchronize your breath and stretching is to exhale as you move into the stretch. You'll notice this instantly decreases the intensity, makes the stretch more comfortable, and you gain the range of motion more easily.

Your Program: How Much and How Often

Daily practice will give you the greatest benefit. This is especially true if you're over the age of 30. With each passing decade the cumulative effects of inactivity, injury, bad posture, muscle imbalances and natural biological changes degrade mobility and flexibility.

However, and let me state this emphatically: a major decline in mobility and flexibility as you age **IS NOT** inevitable. Consistent practice to maintain mobility can stop your body from falling into a slow decline of physical capacity. But with each passing year more time must be spent on maintenance. Just as we must spend time strengthening our muscles so they don't atrophy and wither away, so too will we lose our ability to bend over and pick things up off the floor, or squat down and stand up again easily, if we do not consistently put our joints and muscles through their full ranges of motion — thus telling our brains and bodies that we need mobile and strong muscles and joints.

Since daily practice will deliver the best results, you can easily integrate it into your daily routine by doing the following. Pick 3 joint mobility drills, 3 stretches and 1 breathing exercise from the program to do. You can of course choose to do more, but from my experience this is what most people can manage to do on a regular basis. Do those, and only those drills, for 2 weeks, then pick another 3 joint mobility drills, 3 stretches and 1 breathing exercise to practice for another 2 weeks. Do this until you've gone through them all.

If you follow this recommendation, your Athletic Stretching sessions should only take about 10–15 minutes.

Once you've gone through the whole series, you should be well-versed in the drills by then. So, after that, pick the drills and stretches that seem to work best for you and practice them daily. You can still cycle through the various drills, but don't do this randomly or haphazardly on a daily basis. Our

bodies do better at adapting if we practice the same things every day for a few weeks before moving on to something else. As Bruce Lee once said:

*"I don't fear the man that has practiced 10,000 kicks one time.
I fear the man that has practiced one kick 10,000 times."*

Get very competent in only a few of the drills and stretches before moving on to the next set.

The best times of day for daily practice are in the morning upon waking, or at night before bed. However, the important thing is to do them daily, so pick a time that works best for you and stick to it.

For the joint mobility drills, 5 high quality reps are usually sufficient. But always remember quality over quantity! Making sure you're doing the drills and stretches exactly as instructed in the videos is the only way to ensure you're getting the most out of your mobility training. For the joint mobility drills, there are specific target joints to be focused on and mobilized with precision for your brain/body to receive the maximum benefit. So, take your time and do them right!

For the stretches, 60 seconds, or about 6 breaths, in each position is usually good. Remember that you don't have to stretch both sides equally since we're all asymmetrical. Spend more time on the areas that feel more restricted.

For the breathing exercises, 4 breaths for 3 sets is all you need.

Sample Daily Program

Your daily program will look like this:

1 x Breathing exercise:	4 breaths x 3 sets
3 x Joint mobility drills:	5 reps
3 x Myofascial stretches:	60 seconds, or about 6 breaths

Sample daily session:

- **90-90 Balloon Breathing with Hip Shift** — 4 breaths
- **Bent Knee Controlled Hip Rotations** — 5 reps
- **4 Direction Shoulder Circles** — 5 reps clockwise and counterclockwise
- **Ankle Circles** — 5 reps clockwise and counterclockwise
- **Deep Squat Lat Stretch with Breathing** — 6 breaths
- **Pec Minor Broomstick Mobilization** — 6 breaths
- **Glute Max Stretch** — 6 breaths

If you want to be a real all-star and feel like a million bucks, you can do the entire Athletic Stretching program once a week. But this does not let you off the hook from doing your daily practice.

Micro Sessions

Once you've gone through the entire program and become accustomed to the movements, you should start doing "micro sessions" throughout the day. Pick a joint mobility, stretch or breathing exercise and do a couple reps anywhere from 3–5 times a day. This only takes a couple minutes each time. But you will notice a big difference in how much energy and vitality you'll feel

every day.

Using Athletic Stretching to Reverse the Effects of Time on Your Body and Brain

Our bodies and brains operate on the use it or lose it principle. If the range of motion at a joint is not used frequently enough, our brain gradually 'forgets' how to move that joint well. This is called sensory-motor amnesia.

Over the months and years, dense, inelastic fascia gets laid down in those areas of disuse. This makes it even less flexible and movement becomes much more difficult.

If you're not doing things to actively maintain or gain mobility and flexibility, then you'll gradually lose mobility and flexibility.

Your walking stride turns into a shuffle. And doing basic things like putting on your shoes and getting up off the floor become a Herculean struggle.

The ability to do a full squat to the ground or bend over and touch your toes isn't something that vanishes on its own past a certain age. It goes away because most of us don't ask our bodies to perform these basic movements once we become adults. We hardly ever ask our knees and hips to bend past 90° since we spend most of our lives sitting in chairs. So, we eventually lose the ability to comfortably and fully flex our ankles, knees and hips over time.

According to Davis' law, soft tissue remodels along the lines of stress. What this means is that soft tissue (muscles and fascia) are constantly being laid down according to where they're needed. If you work your bicep muscle enough, the bicep muscle gets bigger because it's been 'told to' by the constant stress placed on it.

However, if the constant stress placed on the soft tissue is coming from sitting at a desk for 8 hours a day, then fascial tissue will be laid down heavily in the areas that need the most support to maintain this position. Which is the upper chest, neck, front of the hips, knees and back of the legs.

Fascia is a supportive structure that's very energy conservative. It makes engineering sense to have more in areas that aren't going to move much. Imagine you're in one of those contests where you have to hold a pint of beer at arm's length for 2 minutes. Pretty soon your arm will start shaking and your grip tiring out. Your muscles are no match. Now imagine your arm is in a full cast. Well now you can hold that pint of beer no sweat. That cast is like your fascial tissue — stiff and supportive. Which is fine until that cast-like material gets placed around areas that you actually want to move.

The best remedy for this is a daily dose of stretching and joint mobility to keep every joint in your body neurologically active and structurally supple. You can observe the many populations around the world, where sitting in a comfy chair isn't the number one activity performed in a day, and you'll see people into their 70s and 80s bending and squatting without trouble.

Not only is regular stretching and joint mobility a must for keeping the body feeling young and mobile, it's also a drastically undervalued way of keeping the brain young and working right! Our brains are essentially fed by two things: fuel from oxygen and glucose, which we get from breathing and food, and *activation*.

The most profound and powerful way of activating your brain is through movement. When you move, especially in a novel or unfamiliar way, many regions in the brain light up with excitement. This triggers neurons (the little messengers in our brains and nervous system) to stay active and alert. These neurons aren't only involved in physical movement however. They're the very same ones involved in all our cognitive functions. So, when you light these millions of neurons by moving, you're also making sure they're alert for all those other things, like remembering the names of the people you just met, being able to learn a new language, or solve problems creatively. If you've ever been on a run or in the gym, and had an epiphany strike you, or suddenly come up with a solution to something you've been working on, then you've experienced the magic of using movement to

stimulate your brain.

Using Stretching and Joint Mobility to Eliminate Pain

Pain is a complex subject, yet it is a universal experience. Many people feel answers to pain questions should be left to the domain of doctors or other licensed medical professionals. However, from my experience, a great many people follow the standard medical protocols and still find no relief from what's hurting them. Sometimes even surgery is performed, and still the pain and dysfunction remains. Why is that? I won't get too deep into this subject, but I want to state one fact (and we do know this to be fact based on mounds of science):

Pain does not always equal injury

And injury does not always equal pain

This means that even though a lot of people blame their aches and pains on a 'bulging disc' or 'meniscus tear', what often is the case is that they usually have a **bad movement** problem. The mistake is assuming because something hurts, something in that area must be damaged or broken. I've seen this countless of times in myself, my own clients and learned about it from extensive study.

Instead of thinking microscopically and assuming something is physically wrong with the area that hurts, zoom out and remember that area is only one small part of the whole person. Maybe an old ankle injury that was never fully rehabbed has imperceptibly altered your walking gait to the point that the impact of every step is causing the knee to absorb stresses that it wasn't meant to handle. Or maybe your pelvis is just a little twisted from always sitting more on one side or constantly crossing your legs the same way. And this tiny twist in the pelvis causes torsional stress at the knee with every heel strike or squat.

MRIs and other imaging technology are often turned to for answers when something hurts. When you go looking for an 'injury' or abnormality in the

body you'll often find it, yet this does not guarantee that THAT is the cause of the problem.

There has been eye-opening research into asymptomatic populations (people who have zero pain or complaints of dysfunction) who were put under MRIs, and it was found that a very large percentage of them actually had serious structural injuries such as labral tears, meniscus tears, bulging discs and rotator cuff tears. Yet they never knew as they'd had no pain or problems with those areas. Again, pain does NOT always equal injury and injury does NOT always equal pain.

So how can you use stretching and joint mobility to affect pain? As I said before, pain is often a symptom of a bad movement, not a bad body part. One easy and time-tested way of improving movement is to practice stretching and joint mobility every day. This helps keep the joints healthy, and the muscles and fascia elastic and responsive, and this allows for better, safer movement bodywide.

In addition, the simple act of safely and properly mobilizing a joint actually neurologically drowns out the pain signal in a way. The signals coming from the mechanoreceptor (nerve endings around a joint that talk to the spinal cord and brain during movement) are MUCH faster and 'louder' than the pain signal coming from a nociceptor (nerve ending that signals pain and threat.) That's one reason why that achy hip or shoulder magically feels so much better, at least temporarily, during a bout of exercise.

What if Something Hurts When I'm Performing a Stretch or Joint Mobility Drill

Nothing in Athletic Stretching should cause pain. If it hurts while performing one of the moves, and assuming there's nothing medically wrong, just decrease the speed and range of motion during the movement until you can do it pain free. For example, if you normally do one rep of a Shoulder Circle in about 2 seconds, take 20 seconds to go through the motion instead. It may seem agonizingly slow at first, but often this minor adjustment has a magical way of reducing or eliminating the pain response. Or if you notice that moving your shoulder in a certain range of motion irritates it, do a smaller range of motion, until you can move the shoulder without any pain.

You may notice in everyday life, pain only appears in certain ranges of motion or while doing specific tasks. As I mentioned before, this doesn't necessarily mean something is "injured" in that area. You may only need to make certain adjustments to how you move for a few weeks, by moving the painful area slowly and intentionally while working within the pain free range of motion, in order to regain complete pain free range of motion of that joint or muscle.

In fact, starting out the stretches and joint mobility drills by doing them **VERY SLOWLY** for the first 2–4 weeks is preferred. This actually trains the nervous system at a deeper level than going through the movements at a quicker speed. Ironically, you'll often see much faster improvements in coordination, balance and flexibility by training the joints in a super slow fashion.

Body Position During Joint Mobility Drills

Although most of the joint mobility drills in the videos are shown standing, many of the drills can be done seated or even lying on the floor. If you have problems with balance, it's a good idea to begin practicing the drills lying or

sitting for the first few weeks. This allows you to really focus on the target joint and the precise movement, without worrying about maintaining balance.

You can even get in the habit of doing the drills sitting right at your work desk throughout the day. This may require some explaining to co-workers though, as you're sure to get some funny looks and questions. If you're sitting or lying, just remember to always maintain a lengthened spine while performing the drills. It's easy to slip into your normal stooped over posture when sitting, so be mindful of staying long and tall throughout your upper body while doing the drill. This is crucial and will ensure your posture is ideal and you'll get the most benefit.

After a few weeks of practicing the drills lying on the floor or sitting, you can progress to standing. Be sure and have something stable to hold onto in the beginning if performing any mobility drill that requires you to stand on one leg. Struggling to maintain balance causes stress and tension. Two things we're always trying to avoid. However doing all the drills standing is the ultimate goal. And will take your training to a new level and have even greater effects on balance, coordination, flexibility and posture.

Using Range of Motion Assessments to Track Progress

Pick one of the following range of motion (ROM) assessments and check it before and after each training session. This is to show if your training session was successful in gaining flexibility bodywide. It doesn't matter which ROM assessment you select. But it's a good idea to pick the one that you're usually the most restricted in, since you're likely to see the biggest change occur. For example, if you're already palming the floor when you do a Forward Bend, but you always feel tight when you try the Side Bend, then use that one as your test.

Neutral Stance Forward Bend

- Set up in a neutral stance
- Keep knees soft and reach for the floor to a comfortable distance without forcing



Neutral Stance Forward Bend

Neutral Stance Back Bend

- Set up in a neutral stance

- Raise arms overhead
- Perform a back bend to a comfortable distance without forcing
- Remain lengthened through entire spine (especially low back and neck) to prevent pinching sensation



Neutral Stance Back Bend

Neutral Stance Back Bend Modified

- Set up in a neutral stance
- Place hands on back hips where back pockets would be
- Perform a back bend to a comfortable distance without forcing
- Remain lengthened through entire spine (especially low back and neck) to prevent pinching sensation



Neutral Stance Back Bend Modified

Wide Stance Back Bend

- Set up in a wider than shoulder width stance and toes pointed out slightly
- Raise arms overhead
- Perform a back bend to a comfortable distance without forcing
- Remain lengthened through entire spine (especially low back and neck) to prevent pinching sensation



Wide Stance Back Bend

Triangle Stance Side Bend

- Set up in a wider than shoulder width stance, with one foot facing straight ahead and the other foot facing directly out to the side
- Raise the arm overhead that's on the same side as the forward facing foot
- Lean your entire body over towards the foot facing out to the side
- Push the outer hip and head away from each other

- Stay long through your entire spine
- Don't rotate your head or body as you bend



Triangle Stance Side Bend

Things to check for during ROM assessments:

- Increase in range of motion
- Speed and ease of movement (i.e. are you able to move with more ease, even if the range of motion didn't increase)
- Fewer areas of tension throughout your body

Final Words

What you have in front of you with Athletic Stretching is much more than another boring, and useless approach to stretching. This is a collection of some of the most powerful drills aimed at improving the overall function and feel of your most valuable resources: your body and brain.

Athletic Stretching is backed by the most up-to-date research into neuroscience, myofascia and human performance. Combining decades of experience by me and my mentors in working with top level athletes and the general population. These hand picked exercises have helped my clients get out of pain, improve their posture and supercharge their performance.

You may be wondering how doing something with your ankle or hip can have an impact on your entire body, or at least large segments of it, that don't seem connected to it. It's because ALL flexibility is governed by one thing: your brain. Your brain takes the incoming information from ALL your joints and tissues at once to decide whether to keep you stiff and tight, or allow you more suppleness and flexibility bodywide.

We've been conditioned to think mobility and flexibility is a segmented and isolated trait: stretch your hamstrings and your hamstrings loosen up as a result. Seems logical. Decades of science on how the human body functions have proven this is an overly simplistic way of looking at muscle function and is in fact inaccurate.

Flexibility can be improved bodywide simultaneously because all 600 or so muscles are being controlled by your brain at the same time. If you do something that your brain 'likes', for example opening a joint in your foot that may have been compressed, it will send a bodywide signal to all your muscles to relax a bit. Isolated muscles operating independently of the whole is a man-made concept. Everything we do to our bodies affects everything else all at once. It's important to remember that.

You'll have many cars, clothes and homes in a lifetime. But you only get one body. Prioritize its maintenance and give it the attention it deserves by using Athletic Stretching to keep its parts and systems running smoothly.

If you would like to speak to me directly about Athletic Stretching, including doing in person or online coaching, you may email me at stretchtherapyhtx@gmail.com.

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■ TikTok	https://www.tiktok.com/@stretch_htx

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