

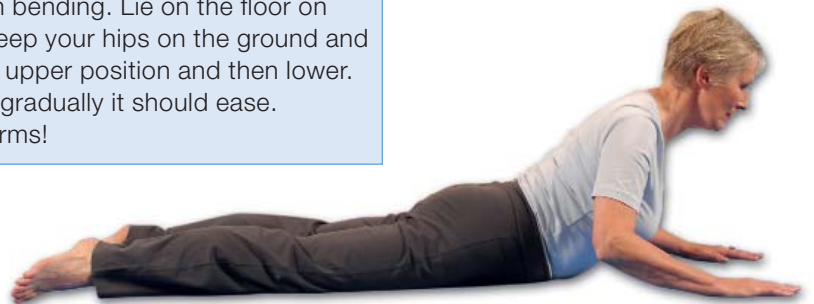
# Stretching makes sense



Stretching is something we should all do on a regular basis, says Cheshire fitness expert Chris Norris

A reasonable level of flexibility is essential to ensure that our joints and muscles function properly and allow us to keep on the move and out of pain. Good flexibility can easily be achieved with a few regular, simple stretches. And being more flexible also means we reduce our risk of sustaining an injury. Leading local chartered physiotherapist and sports scientist Chris Norris of Norris Associates is a renowned expert on the subject. Chris, who lectures to physiotherapists and sport and fitness coaches as well as treating patients at his clinics in Congleton and Sale, has just published his seventh book '*A Complete Guide to Stretching*'.

This is a good exercise if you spend most of your day sitting at work and is also useful after a bout of gardening where you have been bending. Lie on the floor on your front with your hands in a 'press up position'. Keep your hips on the ground and push with your arms to arch your spine. Pause in the upper position and then lower. You may find initially that your spine is quite stiff, but gradually it should ease. Eventually you may even be able to straighten your arms!



This exercise has two functions: it stretches the muscles at the back of your thigh and also the sciatic nerve running through the leg so it's a good movement if you have suffered from sciatica in the past and are now pain free. Lie on the floor with your left leg straight and bend your right knee and hip to 90°. Grip your hands behind the right knee and straighten your leg. Hold the straight position for a count of ten and then bend your knee again. Repeat the movement on the other side of the body. At first you may not be able to lock your knee out fully, but keep at it and over the weeks you will become more flexible.

This exercise is one for everyone who slouches when they sit at a desk. Place a rolled towel on the floor, and then lie over it with the towel roughly level with your shoulder blades. Bend your knees and link your hands together. Keep your arms straight and reach overhead, pressing your upper spine down onto the towel as you do so.



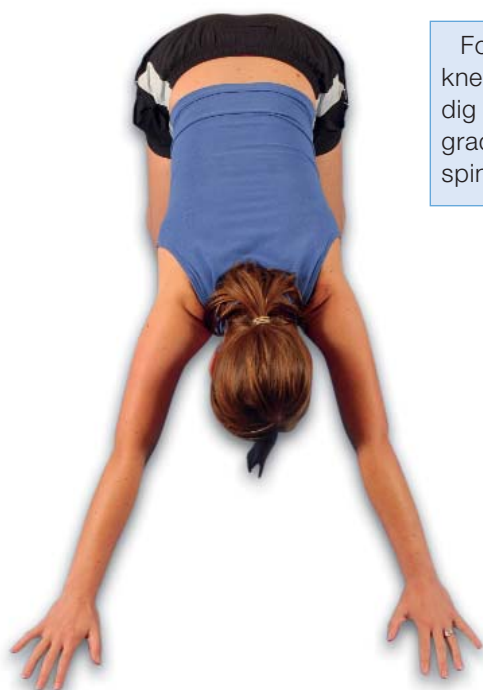


Sit on the floor with one leg straight. If it is more comfortable, sit with your back against a wall. Bend one leg and place your foot above the knee of the straight leg. Allow the knee of your bent leg to lower slowly to the floor. Once in the lower position, hold your foot with one hand and lightly press your knee downwards with your other hand.

The spinal rotation is an excellent movement to release stiffness in the lower back. Lie on the floor with your knees and hips bent. Leave your arms out to the sides in a 'T' position. Lower your knees on one side, pause and then pull them back up again. Take a moment, and then lower them to the other side. If you find this too much of a stretch use two cushions on the floor at either side and lower your knees onto the cushions instead. It is very common for one side to be stiffer than the other, so don't worry.



For this movement you kneel on all fours. If you find it a bit hard on your knees, kneel on a pad or cushion. Reach above your head onto the floor in front of you and dig your fingertips into the carpet. Keeping your hands fixed (don't let them slide) gradually sit back towards your heels and feel the stretch through the whole of your spine and shoulders.



**A Complete Guide to Stretching** by Christopher M Norris is published by A C Black and is available from MDL on 01256 302699. To find out more about Norris Associates please telephone 01260 290564 or visit [www.norrisassociates.co.uk](http://www.norrisassociates.co.uk) to sign up for your free health newsletter.