

STEP IT UP CHALLENGE

STRETCH IT OUT!

Did you know stretching can be more important than the exercise itself?

Stretching is often the overlooked portion of a workout routine. But stretching can be more important than the exercise itself. When muscles get tight they can pull the body out of alignment, limit range of motion, affect performance and increase risk of injury. And it's important to stretch from head to toe regardless of the activity you are participating in. For example, walkers may neglect stretching of the neck muscles since they don't seem to be actively engaged while walking. However, walkers lean forward which can bring their heads out of alignment with their bodies, resulting

in unnecessary pressure on the neck and shoulder muscles.

This can limit range of motion and induce pain in the cervical spine. Stretching has plenty of benefits – and by understanding how different stretches impact your performance, you'll find that you're much less likely to skip this all-important part of your Step Challenge.

David Reavy, Director of React Physical Therapy in Chicago and Prevention Magazine recommends the following stretches for walkers:

5 TOP STRETCHES FOR WALKERS/STEEPERS

CHIN TUCK

Alleviate and avoid neck pain by keeping the neck in proper alignment over your spine.

Lie on a flat surface with legs bent and feet flat on the floor. Press the back of the head into the surface. Chin should tuck slightly down. Keep back entirely flat. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times before walking.



BALL OVER HEAD

To counteract rounded shoulders and maintain erect posture

Lie on a flat surface with your feet flat. With arms straight, take a 6-pound or less medicine ball in both hands and raise the ball above your head. Push the ball toward the ceiling and hold. Slowly lower the ball behind your head as far as you're able to bring back. Repeat 3 times before walking.

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CALF SOLEUS STRETCH

Release tight calf muscles to support the ankles and knees.

Stand on the edge of a step or curb. Extend one heel off the step and slightly bend that knee. Allow the heel to drop below the step. Hold for 30 seconds, then switch to the other calf. Repeat 3 times before walking.

LUMBAR TWIST/PIRIFORMIS STRETCH

Stiff glutes can cause knee and hip pain.

Sit on the floor with your legs extended in front of you. Bend your left knee and place your left foot on the floor on the outside of your right leg (so now your left leg should be crossed over your right leg, with your left knee pointing up toward the ceiling). Rotate your torso to the left and place your right elbow on the outside of your left knee, feeling a stretch on the outside of the left thigh. Hold for 10 seconds, then repeat on the opposite side. Do each side 3 times after walking.



STANDING GROIN STRETCH

Most of the force generated by walking comes from the hip flexors. Stretching can help avoid back pain and hip impingement.

Standing with one leg lunged forward and torso upright, bend trailing knee until it almost touches the ground. For a deeper stretch, lower your knee all the way to the ground. Hold for 10 seconds, each side. Repeat each side 3 times before and after walking.



Embracing a holistic view of the importance of stretching will keep your muscles, tendons, and ligaments limber and ready to take on your Step Challenge safely, efficiently and effectively.

Source:

<https://www.prevention.com/fitness/essential-stretches-walkers>