



Strong Back, Stronger You!



This stretching guide has been adapted from the Strong Back, Stronger You! video, brought to you by the Office of Employee Health and Wellness for State of Maine Employees.



We would like to encourage employees to utilize the information in this stretch guide to prevent injury. These exercises are intended to strengthen your core, to prevent a back injury commonly suffered by state of Maine workers and the general population.

The World Health Organization reports that 60 to 85 percent of the population suffers from low back pain at least once in a lifetime. It has also been noted that 25 percent of all workers compensation claims are for low back pain.

This stretch guide can help you protect your back against injury. Thank you for taking these steps to protect your own health!

As with starting any new exercise program, be sure to check with your health care provider first. Please see the disclaimer information listed below:

The instructions and advice presented are in no way intended to be a substitute for medical counseling. To reduce risk of injury, never force or strain, and use the program only as intended and demonstrated, and follow all instructions carefully. The creators, producers, participants and distributors of this program disclaim any liability or loss in connection with the exercises and instructions in this stretch guide. Please consult a physician before beginning this or any other exercise program.

Please note the following important cautions before using this program:

Not all exercises are suitable for everyone and this or any other exercise program may result in injury. Consult with your doctor before embarking on this or any other exercise program.

Benjamin Ludwig, certified strength and conditioning specialist will guide you through this Strong Back, Stronger You! exercise routine. Heather, a State of Maine employee, will demonstrate the exercises.

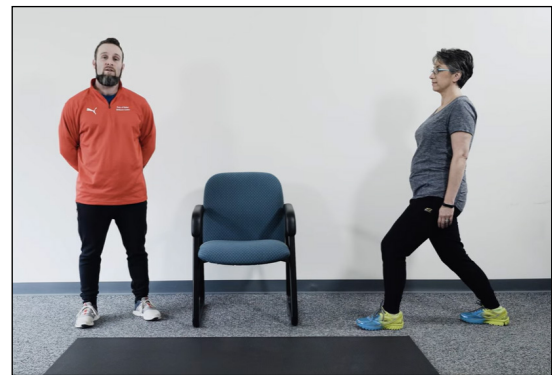
Exercise 1: Standing Trunk Extension Stretch

For this exercise you are going to place your hands on your lower back. Get into a comfortable stance with the feet, and gradually lean back over the hips and over the hands. Make sure that you breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, holding this stretch for 15 seconds. You should feel a gradual pull in the abdominal muscles and a slight pressure in your lower back.



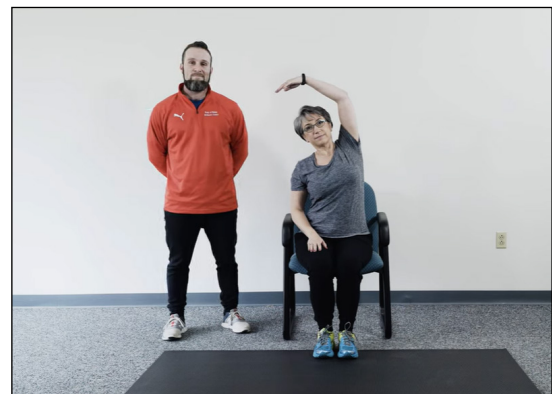
Exercise 2: Standing Hip Flexor Stretch

Here you are going to take one step back, making sure that both feet stay planted flat on the floor. Keep your posture up nice and tall and move your hips forward and down towards the floor. You are going to feel a stretch here in the front of your hip on the trailing leg. Hold this stretch for 10 seconds on each side. Make sure that you are breathing as you hold this stretch. Go ahead and switch legs. Both feet flat on the floor, maintaining your balance. Keep your posture nice and tall, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth.



Exercise 3: Seated Lateral Trunk Stretch

Sitting down comfortably in a chair here, you are going to reach one arm up overhead and then lean slightly over your body. Reaching that arm over, you're going to feel a stretch here from the shoulder right down the side of your body. Holding this stretch for 10 seconds, again make sure that you are breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth. Go ahead and switch sides. Makes sure you are also staying within a comfortable range of motion for that arm and shoulder as you reach overhead.



Exercise 4: Seated Knee to Chest Stretch

Keeping one foot flat on the floor, you are going to grab your other leg and pull that in and up towards your chest. Maintain a tall posture here holding for 10 seconds with each leg. Again, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth. You should feel a pull here in the glutes and the hips, and maybe a little bit in the lower back as well.



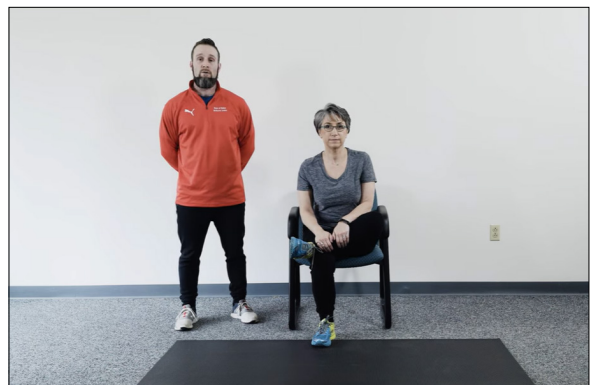
Exercise 5: Seated Hamstring Stretch

Sitting down, you are going to want to stretch one leg out in front of you, with your heel resting on the floor and toes pointed up. Reach nice and slow, down for the toes and keep in mind that it's not necessary to touch the toes here, just go as far as you can while staying within a comfortable range of motion. Hold this stretch for 10 seconds on each side. You should feel the pull here in the back of the thigh and down the back of the leg. Continue deep breathing, in through the nose and out through the mouth.



Exercise 6: Seated "Figure-4" Stretch

You are going to take one leg and cross it in front of you. While grabbing at that crossed over leg with a tall posture, you are going to pull yourself forward and down towards that leg, feeling a pull in the hip and the glute muscles. Again, holding for 10 seconds on each side while taking deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. This should be a nice gradual stretch.



Exercise 7: Glute Contractions

For this stretch, you are going to want to lay down on the floor (as Heather demonstrates). Benjamin will demonstrate this exercise as a standing variation. For the standing variation, just stand comfortably with the toes forward hip width apart. For the laying variation, keep the legs straight. For both variations, you are going to isolate the glute muscles, right on our back side, squeezing those muscles as tight as you can and relaxing for five repetitions. Make sure that you pace it with your breathing, in through the nose and out through the mouth for five full contractions.



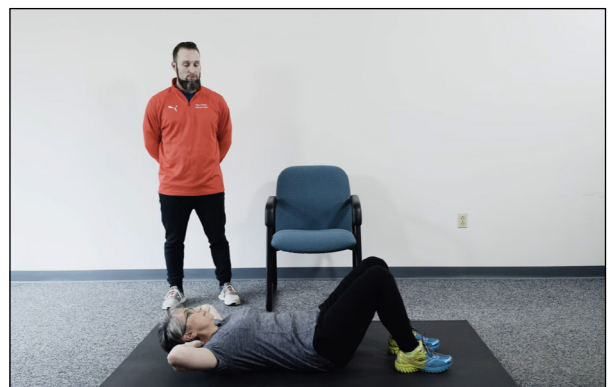
Exercise 8: Abdominal Contractions

In the same nature (either standing or lying down), you are going to isolate the abdominal muscles. Notice how Heather is placing her hands on her stomach so that she knows what her muscles are doing. As you are contracting here, you are going to flex the tummy, pulling the belly button down towards the spine. Again, you can do this standing by placing the hands on the stomach and pulling those muscles in and relaxing. Do this for five full repetitions, making sure that you pace this one with your breathing.



Exercise 9: Sit Ups

For this stretch, you are going to want to bend your knees, placing your feet flat on the floor with your hands up behind your head and neck for support. Make sure that you don't pull on your head and neck for this exercise. You are going to lift the shoulders slightly off the floor and then relax fully down to the floor again. Between each repetition, make sure that you are exhaling as you lift the shoulders up and inhaling as you lower down for five full repetitions.



Exercise 10: Hip Bridges

For this exercise, you are going to want to keep your arms relaxed down to your sides for support while keeping your feet flat on the floor. From here, you are going to squeeze your hips straight up towards the ceiling and relax fully in between each repetition. Perform five full contractions here and make sure you are exhaling as you lift the hips up and inhale as you lower down.



Exercise 11: Standing Trunk Twists

For the last exercise, return to your feet. Standing in a comfortable stance and toes forward, you are going to hold your arms up in a goalpost type position, keeping your eyes, head, and neck forward. You are going to twist your torso and arms to one side and then all the way over to the other side. Perform five full twists on each side of the body. You should feel a gradual pull here across the abdominal muscles and maybe a slight pull in the lower back. Make sure that you breathe as you go through this exercise as well.



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