

Stretches and Strength Training Exercises

Below you will find a wide range of stretches and strength training exercises that you can use to improve your flexibility and core strength. Use this guide to help you get the most out of your Walking Plan

Cat/Camel

Starting Position: Kneel on an exercise mat or floor, positioning your knees and feet hip-width apart. Slowly lean forward to place your hands on the mat, positioning them directly under your shoulders at shoulder-width with your hands facing forward. Reposition your hands and knees as necessary so that your knees are directly under your hips and hands are directly under your shoulders. Gently stiffen your core and abdominal muscles to position your spine in a neutral position, avoiding any sagging or arching.



Upward (Cat) Phase: Gently exhale and contract your abdominal muscles, pushing your spine upwards towards the ceiling and hold this position for 10 - 15 seconds. Allow your head to fall towards your chest, maintaining alignment with the spine



Downward (Cow) Phase: Slowly relax and yield to the effects of gravity. Let your stomach fall towards the floor (increasing the arch in your low back) and allow your shoulder blades to fall together (move towards the spine). Hold this position for 10 - 15 seconds before returning to your starting position.



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Bird Dog

Starting Position: Kneel on an exercise mat or floor, positioning your knees and feet hip-width apart. Place your hands on the mat, positioning them directly under your shoulders at shoulder-width with your fingers facing forward. Make sure your knees are directly under your hips. Stiffen your core and abdominal muscles to avoid any excessive sagging or arching.



This exercise involves simultaneous movement of your leg and opposite arm. This exercise is best performed facing a mirror. Slowly extend your left hip (raise and straighten the knee) attempting to extend it until it is at, or near parallel, to the floor without any rotation in the hip. Your goal is to keep both hips parallel to the floor.

Slowly raise and straighten your right arm attempting to raise it until it is at, or near parallel, to the floor without any tilting at the shoulders. Your goal is to keep the both shoulders parallel to the floor. Your head should remain aligned with the spine throughout the movement.



Downward Phase: Gently lower yourself back to your starting position and repeat with the opposite limbs.



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Glute Bridge

Starting Position: Lie on your back on an exercise mat or the floor in a bent-knee position with your feet flat on the floor. Place your feet hip-width apart with the toes facing away from you. Gently contract your abdominal muscles to flatten your low back into the floor. Attempt to maintain this gentle muscle contraction throughout the exercise.



Upward Phase: Gently exhale while holding your abdominal contraction and press your hips upwards off the floor by contracting your glutes (butt muscles). At the same time press your heels into the floor for more stability. Maintain your abdominal contraction and avoid pushing your hips too high so as not to cause arching of your low back.



Lowering Phase: Inhale and slowly lower yourself back towards your starting position. **Progression:** Gradually progress this exercise by starting with both feet together and extending one leg while in the raised position.

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Hip Hinge

Starting Position: While standing, position your feet shoulder-width apart, side-by-side, with your toes pointed forward or slightly outward. Take a light bar and place it behind your head grasping the end with one hand above your head and the other end with your opposite hand in the small of your back so that your hand touches your low back. Stand vertical so the bar makes contact with the back of your head, your thoracic spine (between your shoulder blades) and your sacrum (butt).



Downward Phase: Gently exhale and begin the movement by shifting your weight onto your heels, then pushing your hips backwards towards the wall behind you and hinge forward at the hips. Move to an end position where your torso is midway between vertical and parallel to the floor allowing only slight movement (bending) at the knees throughout this movement. The bar must continue to remain in contact with the back of your head, thoracic spine and sacrum, and your lower hand must remain in contact with your low back (to prevent any arching). **Continued on next page**

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Upward Phase: Gently inhale and slowly return to your upright, standing position by contracting your glutes and pushing your hips forwards and upward. The bar must remain in contact with the three points throughout this phase.



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Plank

Starting Position: Lie on your stomach on an exercise mat or floor with your elbows close to your sides and directly under your shoulders, palms down and hands facing forward. Contract your quadriceps to extend your legs and your pull toes towards your shins. Contract your core and abdominal muscles to stiffen your torso.



Upward Phase. Slowly lift your entire torso off the floor or mat, maintaining a stiff torso and legs. Avoid any arching (sagging) in your low back, hiking (lifting) in your hips or bending in the knees. Keep your shoulders positioned directly over your elbows with your fingers pointed forward. Continue to breathe while holding this position for 10 – 20 seconds.



Downward Phase: While maintaining a stiff torso and extended knees, gently lower your body back towards the mat or floor before relaxing.

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Side Plank

Starting Position: Lie on your right side on an exercise mat with extended legs, placing your left leg directly over your right leg and stacking your feet one on top of the other. Place your right elbow directly under your shoulder, align your head with your spine and keep your hips and right knee in contact with the exercise mat.



Upward Phase: Exhale, gently contract your abdominal / core muscles to stiffen your spine and lift your hips and knees off the mat, keeping contact with the side of your right foot and keep head aligned with your spine. Keep your right elbow positioned directly under your shoulder. Continue to breathe while holding this position for 10 – 20 seconds.



Lowering Phase: Inhale and gently return yourself to your starting position. Alternate sides and repeat.
Exercise Variation: You can increase the intensity of this exercise by (1) increasing the length of time you are in the raised position, (2) raising the upper leg off the lower leg or (3) raising the lower leg off the floor and maintaining contact with your elbow and the foot of the upper leg only.

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Body Weight Squats

Starting Position: Stand with your feet wider than hip-width (24-36") with your arms by your sides. Pull your shoulders down and back without arching your low back, stiffen your core and abdominal muscles ("bracing") to stabilize your spine. Shift your weight over your heels. If needed, put a chair or bench behind you when squatting.



Movement: Start the downward phase by first shifting your hips backwards then downwards to create a hinge-like movement at your knees. As you lower your hips the knees will then start to shift forward slowly, but try to control the amount of forward movement of the tibia (shinbone). Brace your core to keep your trunk stable and spine straight. Lower your body to a comfortable depth or until your thighs are parallel to the floor and your body weight rests on your heels. Feel free to position your arms where they assist you in maintaining balance.



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Prisoner Rotations

Assume a kneeling position and interlock the hands lightly behind the head without pulling the head forward. Engage the core muscles to stabilize the low back, and maintain this contraction throughout the exercise.



Exhale and slowly rotate the arms to the right until a point of resistance is reached. Keep the hips facing forward, do not let them rotate.



Hold this position for 15 seconds and then laterally flex the trunk, pointing the right elbow toward the floor.
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Hold this position for five seconds. Return to an upright position and then laterally flex in the opposite direction. Hold this position for five seconds.



Return to the upright position.

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Half Kneeling Hip Flexor Stretch

Assume a half-kneeling lunge position, placing the rear leg directly under the hips and torso. Engage the core muscles to stabilize the low back in the neutral position. Maintain this position throughout the exercise.



Exhale and slowly lunge forward to stretch the hip flexors. Avoid arching the low back. Perform two to four repetitions per side. Hold each stretch for a minimum of 15 seconds.



Stretches and Strength Training Exercises

Step Ups onto a 6" to 12" Surface

Starting Position: Stand with your feet parallel about hip width apart. Pull your shoulders down and back, and avoid shrugging your shoulders upwards.

Upward Phase: Slowly step to place your right foot on a platform, placing your foot firmly while keeping your torso upright and aligning your knee over your second toe. Push off with the trailing (left) leg and place that foot alongside your leading (right) foot. During this transition, your torso and your right tibia (shinbone) will move slightly forward past vertical, but try to avoid excessive forward movement.



Downward Phase: Slowly load the weight of your body into your leading (right) foot, step backwards to place the trailing (left) foot on the floor in its starting position. Allow your body to lean slightly forward during the step-down movement. Load your weight into your trailing (left) foot and step off the platform with your leading (right) foot, returning to your starting position. Repeat leading with the opposite leg.

Stretches and Strength Training Exercises

Standing Wood Chop

Stand in a split-stance position with your left foot forward. Hold a medicine ball or weight in both hands, keeping it relatively close to your body. Contract your abdominal / core muscles to stiffen your torso, holding it vertical to the floor. Pull your shoulders down and back without arching your low back.

Starting Position: Slowly rotate your arms with the medicine ball to the left, to a starting position high and behind you, but do not rotate your head, chest or torso. Your head, chest and hips should remain facing forward at all times throughout this exercise. You can bend your elbows to keep the ball close to your body.



Movement: Slowly, rotate your arms down and across your body to the right, to an end point where the medicine ball is positioned near your right hip (performing a wood chop movement). Do not rotate your head, chest, torso or hips, and keep them facing forward. Keep the medicine ball relatively close to your body. Hold this end position briefly before returning to your starting position. Repeat the movement for one set and then do it again in the opposite direction (up on the right, down on the left) with your opposite leg forward.

Exercise Progression: Repeat the same movement, but extend your arms at the elbow and maintain this arm position throughout the wood chop movements. This requires the core muscles to work harder. You can also add a squat when lowering the ball and come back up to a standing position when raising the ball.



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Chest Press with Band

Starting Position: Stand in an erect position with your torso vertical to the floor and your shoulders down and back. Grasp the cable/band handles and step over the band so that it wraps around your back. (You can also wrap it around something such as a railing or post behind you.) Hold the handles in a closed hand with palms facing down and your thumbs wrapped around the handles. (You may need to wrap the band around your wrist a few times to get the correct amount of resistance—or, if you have it wrapped around an object behind you, determine the appropriate spot to stand for the right resistance.)

Movement: Extend one arm at shoulder height, with wrists straight. Stiffen your torso by contracting your core and abdominal muscles ("bracing"). For greater resistance, straighten both arms simultaneously.

Forward Phase: Inhale and gently extend your elbows back to the starting position without allowing your torso to bend forward or your shoulders to shift forward.



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Seated Row with Band

Starting Position: Sit on a mat/floor with your knees slightly bent, feet together and back in an erect position with your torso vertical to the floor. Gently lean forward, bending at the hips and not rounding your back to grasp the cable/band handles. (Note: the band can be wrapped around your feet or secured to an object just beyond your feet). Hold the handles in a closed hand with palms facing each other and your thumbs wrapped around the handles. Stiffen your torso by contracting your core and abdominal muscles ("bracing") and slowly extend your torso until your back is vertical and perpendicular to the floor, keeping your elbows fully extended.



Backward Phase: Without leaning backwards, exhale and pull the handles towards you. Bending your elbows, hold on to the weight with your hands but think about pulling back with your elbows and keep them close to your body until the handles reach your sides. Avoid any arching in your low back or shrugging of your shoulders during your pull. Maintain the slight bend in your knees and neutral wrist position (avoid flexion and extension) throughout the movement.



Forward Phase: Inhale and gently extend your elbows back to the starting position without allowing your torso to bend forward or your shoulders to shift forward.

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Overhead Press with Band

Starting Position: Stand in an erect position with your torso vertical to the floor and your shoulders down and back. Grasp the cable/band handles and step on the band so that it is underneath one or both feet. (If you use one foot, stagger your stance and put that foot in the middle in front of your body, so that the band length is equal on both sides. Two feet can also be used for added resistance (see picture below). Hold the handles in a closed grip with palms facing forward and your thumbs wrapped around the handles.



Movement: Extend one or both arms upward, with wrists straight. Stiffen your torso by contracting your core and abdominal muscles ("bracing"). For greater resistance, straighten both arms simultaneously.



Inhale and gently lower your elbows back to the starting position without allowing your torso to bend forward or your shoulders to shift forward.

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Forward and Backward Lunges

Stand upright with both feet at hip width apart. Contract your abdominal / core muscles to stiffen your torso, holding it vertical to the floor. Pull your shoulders down and back without arching your low back.

Step forward with your right foot to lunge straight ahead of you. Be sure your knee and toe point in the same direction with your knee not bent further forward than your toes.



Push off of your lead leg and go back to the starting position, standing vertically. Your head, chest and hips should remain facing forward, towards your front knee, at all times throughout this exercise. Do one set of these forward lunges with your right leg leading and one with your left leg leading.

Then, lunge backwards. Your right leg steps backwards to do this reverse lunge.



Push off with your right leg to return to a vertical position with both feet together. Do a set of these reverse lunges. Then, do a set of reverse lunges with your left leg leading.

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Push Ups

Starting Position: Lie on your stomach on an exercise mat or floor with your elbows close to your sides and directly under your shoulders, palms down and hands facing forward. Your knees are bent with your weight on the thighs, just above the knees. Contract your core and abdominal muscles to stiffen your torso. Keep it straight and tight throughout this exercise.



Upward Phase. Slowly lift your torso off the floor or mat, maintaining a stiff torso and legs. Avoid any arching (sagging) in your low back and bending at the hips. Keep your shoulders positioned directly over your elbows with your fingers pointed forward.



Downward Phase: While maintaining a stiff torso and hips, gently lower your body back towards the mat or floor.

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Abdominal Crunches

Starting Position: Lie in a supine (on your back) position on a mat with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor and heels 12 - 18" from your tailbone.

Place your hands behind your head, squeezing your shoulder blades together and pulling your elbows back without arching your low back. This elbow position should be maintained throughout the exercise. Align your head with your spine.



Upward Phase: Exhale, contract your abdominal and core muscles and flex your chin slightly towards your chest while slowly curling your torso towards your thighs. The movement should focus on pulling your rib cage towards your pelvis (the neck stays relaxed while the chin is tucked towards the neck). Your feet, tailbone and lower back should remain in contact with the mat at all times. Continue curling up until your upper back is lifted off the mat. Hold this position briefly.



Downward Phase: Gently inhale and slowly uncurl (lower) your torso back towards the mat in a controlled fashion keeping your feet, tailbone and low back in contact with the mat.

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Bicep Curls with Band

Starting Position: Stand in an erect position with your torso vertical to the floor and your shoulders down and back. Grasp the cable/band handles and step on the band so that it is underneath one or both feet. (If you use one foot, stagger your stance and put that foot in the middle in front of your body, so that the band length is equal on both sides. Two feet can also be used for added resistance (see picture below). Hold the handles in a closed grip with palms facing forward and your thumbs wrapped around the handles.

Movement: Keeping the elbows locked at your sides, slowly bend one elbow until your hand gets close to your shoulder. Stiffen your torso by contracting your core and abdominal muscles ("bracing"). Slowly lower it to an extended position and repeat with the other arm.



Stretches and Strength Training Exercises

Tricep Dips

Starting Position: Sit on the edge of a bench. While holding on to the bench, slide your hips forward so they are off of the bench. Supporting your weight on your hands and feet, start with your elbows bent at approximately 90 degrees as shown.



Movement: Push up on your hands, extending your elbows to an almost straightened position. Lower yourself back down slowly to the starting position but do not let your body sit down in between repetitions.

The placement of your feet can help you change the resistance. For less resistance, walk your feet in closer to your body. For more resistance, walk your feet further away or put a small block or another bench under your heels.

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YOGA poses for cool down

When performing these yoga postures, it is essential to turn your focus inward and to think about your body position and breathing. Hold each posture for 3 - 5 breaths and transition slowly from one posture to another in a gentle flow. As you become more experienced, you can hold these poses for 6 – 8 breaths.

Mountain pose: Stand up straight with either feet together or hip width apart. Evenly press the soles of your feet into the floor as you activate your thigh muscles. Keep the neck long and in neutral alignment with your shoulders relaxed. Reach your arms up overhead with palms facing each other. Focus on a spot in front of you to maintain your balance.



Forward fold: From a standing position, hinge at the hips to lower your upper body towards your legs. Keep a slight bend in your knees to avoid overstretching your hamstrings. Your neck should stay in alignment with your spine as you look downwards at a spot on the floor. Relax into the pose as you breathe to further the stretch.



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Downward facing dog: Slowly bend your knees to place your palms flat on the mat, positioning your hands shoulder-width apart with your fingers facing forward and spread wide. Step backward and reposition your feet to allow full extension of your arms and legs. Feet should be placed hip-width apart and both elbows and knees should be kept in a relaxed extended position (avoid locking out the joints). Keeping the head and neck relaxed, slowly move your head between your shoulders as your body moves backwards, pressing your chest towards your thighs while attempting to draw your heels towards the floor. Maintain the stiffness in your torso to prevent arching or rounding of the back. Continue moving until your body forms an inverted-V, keeping both arms and legs extended and a neutral (flat) spine. Allow a slight bend in the knees if required to achieve the inverted-V position.



Cobra: From downward dog, inhale to a plank position and lower your body to a prone position on the floor (on your stomach), maintaining the alignment of all your body segments. Keep your hands positioned directly under your shoulders with fingers facing forward and extend your legs and plantar flex your ankles (toes point away from body).

Gently exhale and press your hips into the mat or floor and pull your chest away from the ground while keeping your hips stable. This will arch your low back and stretch the muscles in your chest and abdominal region.



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Child's pose: Push your body up to a kneeling position and sit back on your feet with your heels and the soles of your feet pointing outward. Your knees should be separated, about the width of your hips.

Place your forehead on the floor, reaching your arms forward.



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Yoga moves for balance

For all of these, use a nearby table or wall for support if necessary.

Tree Pose: From a standing position, slowly exhale and assume a single-leg stance on the right foot while bending the left knee and placing the sole of the left foot, toes pointing down, on the inside of the right leg between either the knee and ankle or between the knee and groin. Inhale and bring the arms overhead, joining the palms together. Repeat the pose while standing on the opposite leg.



Eagle Pose: Stand straight with your feet together and with your arms at your sides. Cross your right arm underneath your left. Raise your elbows up to shoulder height with your fingers pointing towards the ceiling. Bring your palms together as close as possible, depending on your flexibility. While maintaining the position of your arms, slightly bend your knees without going over your toes. Slowly lift your right leg, cross it to your left thigh as you curve your left foot around your right calf. Repeat the steps on the opposite side of your body.

