

Bridge Exercise

Use: To strengthen the butt, stomach, and low back muscles.

Equipment: Carpeted floor or mat



To Perform:

1. Lie on your back with your arms resting at your side. Bend your knees and bring your feet in towards your hips, keeping your feet flat on the floor. Your knees should be directly over your toes and remain there throughout the movement. Try not to let your knees come closer together or fall further apart.
2. Contract your stomach muscles, as if you are pulling your belly button into your spine.
3. Exhale as you lift your hips up by tightening your butt muscles. At the top of the movement, your body should form a diagonal line from your knees to your chest.
4. Pause briefly in this position, keeping your butt and stomach muscles tightened.
5. Inhale as you return to the starting position by dropping your hips slowly back to the ground while keeping your stomach muscles tight. Feel as if you are rolling down, allowing just one vertebrae to come back to the ground at a time.
6. Pause briefly, and then repeat the exercise by lifting your hips off the ground, again.

Form Pointers:

- Maintain proper form by keeping your back straight at the "top" of the exercise.
- Arching the back may lead to injury. To prevent arching, keep stomach muscles contracted.

Tip Box

If you have difficulty transferring to the floor, perform this exercise in bed when you first wake up.

To make the exercise more difficult, hold the lifted ("up") position longer, place weight or resistance over your hips, lift one leg off of the ground or place one foot across the opposite knee.

Another way to make this more difficult is to combine it with the Seated Pillow Squeeze and squeeze a pillow between your legs while performing.



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Back Extension

1. Lying
2. Seated with Resistance Band
3. Seated without Resistance Band

Use: To strengthen the stomach muscles, back and butt/hips

Equipment: Carpeted floor or mat



Lying:

- Start by lying on your stomach with your hands placed palms down on the floor, directly beneath your shoulders.
- Breathe in and maintain a long spine.
- As you breathe out, raise your chest slightly off the ground using your back muscles, but without pushing with your hands.
- Return to the starting position and relax.
- Repeat
- **Form Pointers:**
 - Shoulder blades (scapulas) remain anchored.
 - Stomach muscles remain firm to assist the movement.
 - Keep neck long and relaxed. Do not crunch your shoulders up toward your ears.

Tip Box

If you have difficulty transferring to the floor, perform these from your bed when you first wake up in the morning.

For more difficulty, perform with arms extended out in front of you (image).



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Cat-Cow Pose

Use: Increases back flexibility and stomach strength.

Equipment Needed: Carpeted floor or mat



1. Start on your hands and knees with your back straight/neutral.
2. Position your hands directly beneath the shoulders and your knees directly beneath the hips.
3. Your legs will be separated about hip/shoulder width apart.
4. Fully spread your fingers open.
5. As you exhale, press through your hands and round your back and hips upward (**Cat Tilt**).
6. As you inhale, rotate your hips and back downward and come back to a neutral spine, looking in front of you (**Cow Tilt**).
7. Repeat

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Center the Mind/Focus the Brain

Use: To bring your attention to your breath.

Equipment Needed: None



1. Come to a comfortable seat.
2. Sit up as straight as possible while remaining relaxed.
3. Your hands can rest in your lap or anywhere they are comfortable.
4. Close your eyes, if this is comfortable for you.
5. **FIRST:** Simply notice your breath. Observe the breath as it comes in and goes out. Feel what parts of the body move as you inhale and exhale. Notice if the breath is balanced between the inhale and exhale, or if one is deeper or longer. Try to relax for 1-2 minutes.
6. **NEXT:** Deepen your breath to expand all three parts of your lungs. Inhale and fill the belly, rib cage, and chest with breath. Exhale and deflate all three. Attempt to balance the length of inhale and exhale, possibly even counting them. Concentrate on this three part breath for 2-3 minutes.
7. **FINALLY:** Return to the first step. Relax your breathing, allowing it to return to normal. Observe the natural inhale and exhale for another 1-2 minutes.

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Eye Exercises

Use: To strengthen eye muscles and improve concentration and focus.

Equipment: Chair, if desired

To Perform:

- Come to a comfortable seat
- Sit up as straight as possible, while remaining relaxed.
- Your hands can rest in your lap or anywhere they are comfortable.
- Trying to perform the movement from your eyes and not your neck or head
- Look up, then look down.
- Look to the right, then look to the left.
- Look to the top right, then look to the bottom left.
- Look to the top left, then look to the bottom right.
- Look up.
- Roll your eyes clockwise.
- Roll your eyes counterclockwise.



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Glute (Butt) Stretch

Use: To stretch your butt (gluteus) muscles

Equipment: Carpeted floor or mat if lying; chair if seated.

To Perform Lying:

- Lie on your back and bend your knees, placing both feet flat on the ground.
- Cross your right leg over your left knee so that your right ankle rests on your left thigh just above your knee.
- Use your hands to hold behind the left thigh and gently pull your leg towards you until you feel the stretch in your bottom and outer thigh.
- Try to keep your right knee pointed to the side.
- Hold for 8-10 seconds and then repeat on the other leg.



To Perform Seated:

- Sit tall on a chair or bench with your feet flat on the floor and your heels directly below your knees.
- Cross one leg over the other leg, with the ankle of one leg resting on the thigh of the other.
- Lean down, lowering the torso toward the thighs, but maintaining a straight back.
- Keep the knee of the lifted leg pressed towards the ground.
- Hold for 8-10 seconds and then repeat with the opposite leg.



Tip Box

To intensify the stretch, try tilting your pelvis forward (curling your low back slightly).

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Hamstring Stretch

Use: Stretches the back of the upper leg (hamstring muscles) and promotes better sitting, standing, and walking posture

Equipment: Chair, if desired

To Perform Seated:

1. Sit tall at the front edge of your chair, both feet flat on the floor.
2. Extend one leg out in front of you, with the heel resting on the ground and toe pointed towards the ceiling.
3. Keep the knee of the extended leg and your back straight while gently bending forward from the hips and leaning your chest toward your legs.
4. Hold this position for 15-30 seconds, feeling a stretch through the back of the upper leg.
5. Repeat with the other leg extended and first leg bent.

To Perform Standing:

1. Stand tall with feet shoulder width apart.
2. Slightly bend one leg while extending the other leg out in front of you with the heel rested on the floor and toes pointed towards the ceiling.
3. Keep the knee of the extended leg and your back straight while gently bending forward from the hips and leaning your chest toward your legs.
4. Hold this position for 15-30 seconds, feeling a stretch through the back of the upper leg.
5. Repeat with the other leg extended and the first leg straight.



NOTE: Although it is ok to rest your hands on your knees, do not put any pressure directly on your knees.

Tip Box

Do not perform this stretch if it increases leg or knee pain.

Only stretch to the point of slight discomfort, not pain.

You can vary this stretch by sitting on the ground with both legs stretched out in front of you and toes pointed towards the ceiling. Keeping a slight bend in both knees and a neutral spine, reach your hands towards your toes as you drop your chest towards your knees.

You can also perform this stretch by lying on your back. See Stage 2 Exercises for this version.

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Jaw Exercise

Use: To relieve tension in the head, face, and neck.

Equipment: None



To Perform:

1. Sit in a chair or wheelchair with your hands in your lap, or wherever is most comfortable.
2. Inhale and stretch open your mouth, eyes, and jaw as wide as possible
3. Exhale and release.
4. Repeat.

Form Pointers:

- Maintain proper posture throughout.
- Keep the body relaxed throughout the exercise.

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Pointer

Use: To strengthen and tone the posterior core muscles which include the butt (glutes), low back, and stomach (abdominals).

Equipment: Mat or carpeted floor

To Perform:

- Start on your hands and knees, with hands directly under your shoulders, knees directly under your hips and a flat back (as shown in the first picture).
- Contract your stomach muscles.
- Keep your eyes pointed towards the ground throughout the exercise and your spine neutral (in its natural alignment).
- Gradually straighten the right leg (hip and knee), leading with the foot, and kicking straight behind you so that your leg is parallel to the floor in the extended position. Keep the toe pointed towards the ground and make sure your leg does not go out to the side or across your body.
- At the same time, lift the opposite arm straight out in front of you until it is also parallel to the ground, trying not to shift your weight as you lift your arm and leg.
- Hold at the top for a second and slowly lower.
- Repeat on both sides.
- You can alternate sides or do all of your reps on one side before switching to the other.



NO!



*If you feel or see your lower back sagging or swaying too much (see image to left), raise it a little by tightening your stomach muscles. Please note, a *slight* curve in your lower spine is normal (image to right).

YES!



Tip Box

To increase the difficulty, add a cuff weight to your wrists and/or ankles. You can also use a scarf or bandana to tie a bag of beans to your ankle to create some additional resistance. Be creative!

If you have a mirror, it may be helpful to check your technique and posture.

If your arms, hands, or knees need more support in this position, use a stability ball or stool/ottoman under your torso so that your hands/knees are not supporting as much weight. Make sure that the height of the support object keeps your natural posture.

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Shoulder Circles

Use: To increase range of motion and decrease tension in the shoulders and upper back

Equipment: Chair, if desired



To Perform:

- Come to a comfortable seat.
- Sit up as straight as possible, while remaining relaxed.
- Your hands can rest in your lap or anywhere they are comfortable.
- For the circle movement, think about moving the shoulder-blades in this pattern:
 - Open the shoulder blades apart from each other.
 - Move them up your back, raising your shoulders (see image to right)
 - Squeeze the shoulder blades together toward the spine.
 - Then drag the shoulder blades down the spine
- Explore the full range of motion of the shoulders, really focusing on each direction the shoulders move.
- Breathe deeply and fully as you move.
- Do 5 circles then reverse the direction and do 5 the other way.



- Move both shoulders together in a circle, and then try to move each shoulder individually (see image to right).



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