



THE
BernsteinInstitute
FOR INTEGRATIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

**MYOFASCIAL STRETCHING PROGRAM
FOR PAIN AND STIFFNESS**

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you start your stretches remember that you want to keep several things in mind. They are:

Please check with your doctor if you have any concerns about doing these stretches.

Move slowly through each stretch. If you experience extreme pain, stop.

Take the time to hold your stretch for 3 to 5 minutes. Take it to the end range and then elongate or telescope and hold. This allows the fascia to stretch like taffy. You will feel the benefits for a longer period of time.

Allow your body to stretch and follow the “path of least resistance”. Let the body move where it wants. The body knows how to care for itself.

If one side or area is more flexible or less painful than the other start on the side that's easiest.

Be sure to breathe deeply while you're stretching. Continue to breathe into the areas that are stiff or painful. Pay attention to the release within the fascia.

Don't be surprised if you are sore the next day.

STRESS RELIEF

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

Become aware of slowing yourself down with breathing exercises. Break the cycle of tightness and stress in the body.

Lie down with one hand on chest and one hand on belly. Start with chest...bring awareness to the breathing pattern.

Then start to breath with deep inhales and exhales two or three times (4 counts in and 4 counts out). Get your body to slow down.

Next step is to go to belly breathing. Repeat the process as with chest very slowly. Fill your belly with a deep inhale and let it go slowly. Repeat two or three times.

Focus your attention to each area of your body and allow to soften and release. Now you are ready to combine the two. You can start with either the chest or belly; which ever you prefer.

For example: If you start with belly first slowly take a deep breath and fill your belly with air. You're going to notice that your chest will expand. Allow that breath to travel into the chest. Release the air through your mouth with a sound or sigh.

Pay attention to how your body starts to feel. The purpose is to slow your body down.

Do diaphragmatic breathing on a regular basis.

UPPER BODY / NECK, JAW, HEAD, SHOULDER AND ARMS

NECK RELEASE WITH TOWEL

Do this either standing or sitting. Use a bath towel and fold over several times lengthwise . Elongate over one shoulder. If starting on right use your right arm to hold the end of towel in the back. Left arm holds the end of the towel in the front. Bend your neck away from towel (3 to 5 minutes). Take your time and release slowly.



OCCIPUT RELEASE WITH TOWEL

With towel folded – bring it up around occiput (base of skull). With hands holding the ends of the towel traction or extend up slowly toward ceiling. Move neck in direction of ease – like rope unwinding. Stop at stuck spots until softened.



OCCIPUT RELEASE WHILE SITTING

While sitting, put towel at base of skull (occiput) and traction or extend while bending forward slowly. Let head and neck move with ease where it wants to.

OCCIPITAL RELEASE USING HANDS

Lie on your back with your body crossed laterally on a bed. Your head should be close to the edge. With one hand on your neck scoot back and let your head come off the edge of the bed just a little. Let go with your hand and rotate neck back and forth. Next, slide down a little more letting the head drop even more. The neck is lower than the trunk of the body. Use both hands to suspend neck in traction and elongate – very important to support the neck. Never get up without holding or supporting the neck. Pull neck slowly and steadily outward (not up or down). Take your time – never get jerky or harsh.

Note: How to sit up after lying down: roll to side and push up with arm slowly.



TMJ – JAW

This can be done either standing, seated or lying down. With the flat of your hands press lightly on both sides of your face in front of your ears. Pull your mandible (jaw) forward slightly and hold for 3 to 5 minutes. This can be done numerous times per day. Always do this before going to bed.

HEADACHES

This can be done either standing, seated or lying down. With fingers at your temples next to your eyes move your fingers forward. Hold very lightly for 3 to 5 minutes.

ARM STRETCH

While standing, start with arms at your sides. Begin to bring your arms up to about shoulder height straight out to the sides. Stretch arms all the way out to the fingers as if your were reaching for something. Hold for 3 to 5 minutes.

Breathe into stretch and allow your body to move in any direction that will enhance the stretch.

PECTORAL AND SHOULDER STRETCH

While standing, clasp hands behind back. Bring your shoulders back and straighten and extend arms downward. If you would like to enhance the stretch you can bend forward bringing your clasped hands toward ceiling.

Optional stretch: While bending forward with hands clasped behind you, bring heel forward on right foot and stretch the hamstrings. Repeat with other foot.



MIDDLE BODY / UPPER AND LOWER BACK, ABDOMINALS

LOWER BACK STRETCHES

Roll onto back (best done on carpet). Bring legs into chest and hold knees with hands. Spread legs as wide as possible. Roll side to side. Look for hard or tender spots. Roll on the hard spots – it will release. If not, stay on that spot until released then rock again.

For a more difficult stretch lift butt off floor. You can tuck up further and breathe into it all the while rolling side to side. Be sure to work very slowly.



SACROILIAC STRETCH

The area you're stretching is on either side of sacrum (the base of your spine). It tends to jam easily and then the pain can radiate up into the lower back as well as the gluteals.

Find something that you can place your foot on at a comfortable height (possibly a chair or table). Place one hand on chair or table and bring foot up, bending the leg at the knee. Leg should be extending from the side of the body.

With elbow on the inside of the leg bend forward slowly and hang down – “like gravity is pulling you down.” Breathe slowly and hold for 3 to 5 minutes, bending further as you can.

If you feel steady you can take hand and place on sacrum and push gently and hold. Put hand on table or chair and slowly straighten up. Do other leg in the same manner. When finished you can go back to the areas that are a problem.



SACRUM

Stand with your back against a wall. Bring your feet out about 12" and bend your knees, leaning against the wall with as much of your back as you can. Be aware that your sacrum (the end of your spine) should be flat against the wall. Lift your head toward ceiling and elongate spine then let head fall forward slowly. While keeping your sacrum against the wall continue to drop slowly to the point you can go no further. Hold this stretch and rotate the sacrum gently in whatever way it wants to move.



PELVIC ALIGNING TECHNIQUE

While lying down bend legs and bring both knees up. Place right foot on left knee. Push down with right foot and pull up with left knee – “push-pull effect”. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat again 3 times. Do this on the other side with left foot on right knee. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 3 times.

Note: There is no motion in “push-pull”. The dynamic tension does the work.

LOWER BODY / GLUTEALS AND LEGS

CALF STRETCH

With hands on table or something very stable, lean body forward and then elongate or extend one leg (calf). Feel the fascia stretch – it will spread throughout the whole body system. Stay quiet internally and pay attention to “knotted areas”.

Focus the stretch on those knotty restrictions. Wait there until it lets go (releasing feels like butter melting or taffy stretching. When finished do the other leg.



HAMSTRING STRETCH

With both feet side by side about 12" and hands on table or holding onto something very stable bend forward over the table until you feel the fascia stretch in the back of your legs. Make sure to keep your legs straight. Breathe into it. Be aware of lifting the pelvis towards the ceiling. Hold stretch for 3 to 5 minutes.



PIRIFORMIS (gluteal region)

While sitting on a chair, rest the ankle of one leg on the knee of the other. Gently bring upper body forward over the bent leg. You will feel the pull through the gluteal region. Breathe into the stretch and hold for 3 to 5 minutes. When finished, do the other leg.



ADVANCED STRETCH FOR GLUTEALS

(Not for acute knee problems). While on floor on knees, move body and hands forward. Tuck one leg under you (bend leg at knee and cross over in front of you). Hands are on floor in front of you. Lean slowly forward over bent knee. Let other leg go backward. To enhance the stretch you can come forward to your elbows.

ADDUCTOR SQUEEZE

While sitting with knees up, place your arm between both knees while supporting yourself with the other hand. Squeeze legs together for 10 seconds then rest and repeat 3 times.

Sit at corner edge of table or bed and draw legs back. Lean back on hands and try to squeeze your knees together.

UPSLIP/DOWNSLIP

While lying down on bed or floor, hike the downslipped hip toward shoulder. At the same time you will push the other leg in the opposite direction pulling the upslipped hip downward. Hold for a count of 10 and repeat 3 times.

USING THERAPIST'S BALL

If you don't have a therapist's ball you can buy any kind of ball that's spongy or inflatable around 4 to 5 inches in diameter. Make sure it's not too hard.

On carpeted floor or bed, slowly lay on ball. Roll around on ball. Find spots where there is pain or tenderness. Let body sink in to these tender spots. Spend 5 to 15 minutes.

You can use ball between wall and body. Lean against ball – roll the ball into all the tight areas. Use on the spine, shoulders and even neck. Go up or down, side to side. Be sure to breathe into the areas of tightness.

UNWINDING SELF

You can sit, stand or stretch out on floor. Stretch arms out until beginning to move in direction of ease while telescoping or elongating. Body will stop at restrictions then body will take you through it. Use no force or conscious effort—just let body care for itself. You can use music – if you don't think a lot. Use unwinding as a regular routine - tuning you into the mind-body complex and feeling the bio-energy flow of the body. It's OK to make noise with it such as groaning, etc. You will find you'll be more fluid than before.

STAR UNWINDING

Standing with arms and legs stretched outward, move as body wants – no forcing. Breathe into it. Children can do it – use fantasy music and make it fun. You may feel some therapeutic pain. It is normal and does not injure.

HEALING CRISIS

Some people experience feeling worse before they get better. It should last no more than 1 to 3 days. You are making some positive changes in your body and correcting negative patterns. It's worth while to stay with the program and reap the benefits.

STICK WITH IT – YOUR BODY WILL BENEFIT