



KEEP IN MIND

- For best results, stretch at least three times a week.
- Hold each stretch for 30 to 60 seconds, breathing slowly and deeply.
- Never force or strain, and be sure to modify and adapt if need be.
- Take each stretch to the point where you're just at your "edge"—not too much sensation, but just enough to feel the muscles elongating.
- Put your mind into your muscles, visualizing your body becoming leaner, stronger and sleeker.



Check out editor-in-chief Diane Hart's blog at oxygenmag.com for behind-the-scenes video of Francisca Dennis

Get Lean & Tall

Elevate your stature
in five easy ways.

BY PEGGY HALL | PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL BUCETA

in minutes

Exercise improves your stamina, boosts your energy and gets you lean.

But what if you only have time to stretch? Guess what? – stretching can go a long way toward making you feel slender. “Stretching and other recovery-type practices like deep breathing and yoga can have a profound effect on weight management as part of a complete exercise and nutrition plan,” explains Brooke Kalanick, a New York-based naturopathic doctor, licensed

acupuncturist and co-author of the upcoming book *Ultimate You* (Rodale Press, 2010). Kalanick says that stretching can induce a feeling of calm and lessen cravings as your body releases feel-good hormones like serotonin and lowers stress-producing hormones like cortisol. Translation? No need to turn to chocolate or ice cream to de-stress.

While gentle stretching may not be a huge calorie-burner in and of itself and you’ll need to find time to

include both cardio and resistance training to see big-time weight loss, there are other physiological changes going on when you’re elongating your muscles that help you feel slimmer and stronger. “When stretching is performed properly, your muscles contract through resistance,” says stretching expert Donna Flagg, who is on the faculty of the Joffrey Ballet School and creator of the Lastics approach to stretching, which focuses on isolating the two ends of the muscle and pulling them in

opposite directions.

“People in my classes learn to articulate their muscles from deep within their body, as dancers do,” she says. This helps to increase your range of motion and to prevent injuries and body imbalances. That means less time out of the gym due to aches and pains – and more energy and confidence to exercise. “I have seen my adult students becoming slimmer and firmer from stretching this way – even without rigorous cardio or restrictive dieting.”

MODEL FRANCISCA DENNIS HAIR & MAKEUP VALERIE NOVA STYLIST RACHEL MATTHEWS-BURTON CLOTHING TOP AND BOTTOM LULULEMON SHOES MODEL'S OWN

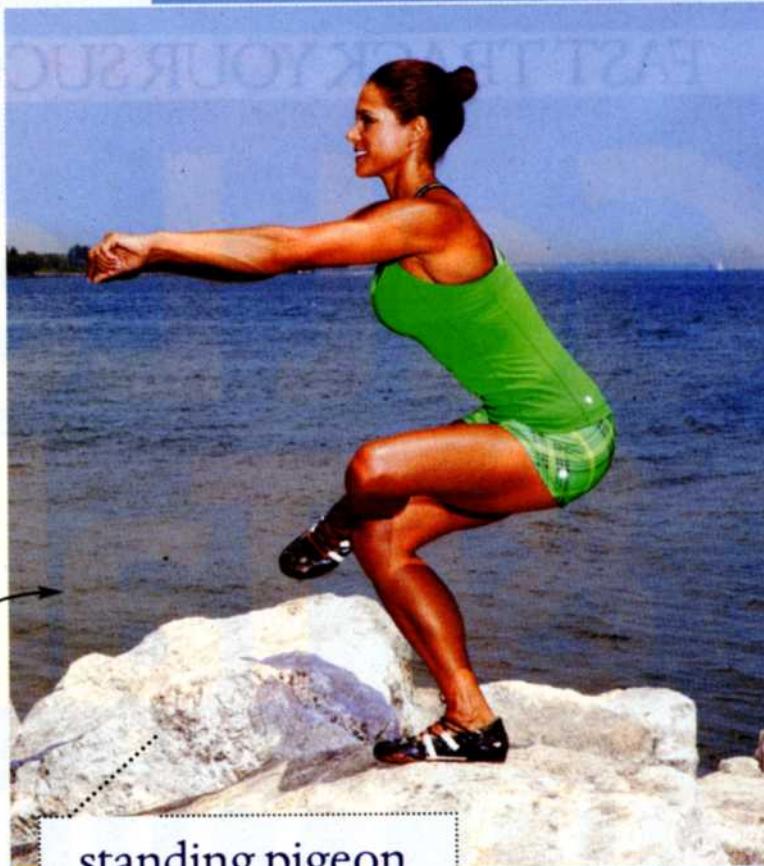
1 chest opener

Target Muscles: chest, triceps

Clasp your hand behind your head. Inhale and lift your chest, draw your elbows back and press your head into your hands. Exhale and ease off slightly. Repeat several more times in a smooth, controlled manner, moving with a slow, deep breath.



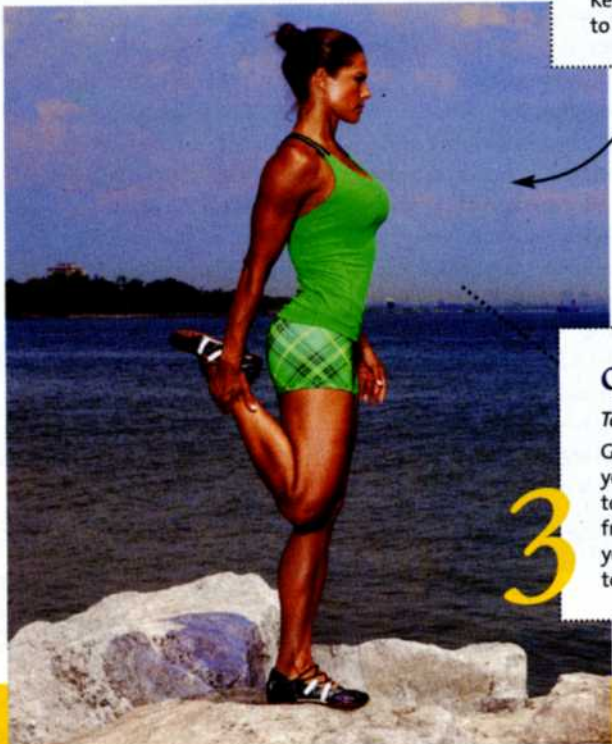
Soothe your mind and spirit by taking your stretching outside. ➤



2 standing pigeon

Target Muscles: glutes, hips, lower back

Cross your left ankle over your right thigh and bend your standing leg to increase the sensation in your hip and glute. Extend your arms or use a wall for balance. Gaze at a spot in front of you for better focus and stability. Keep your breath flowing. Hold for 30 to 60 seconds and switch sides.



3 quad stretch

Target Muscles: quads, knees

Grasp your right foot or ankle with your right hand and draw your heel toward your glute. Press through the front of your right hip and try to keep your knees close together. Hold for 30 to 60 seconds on each leg.

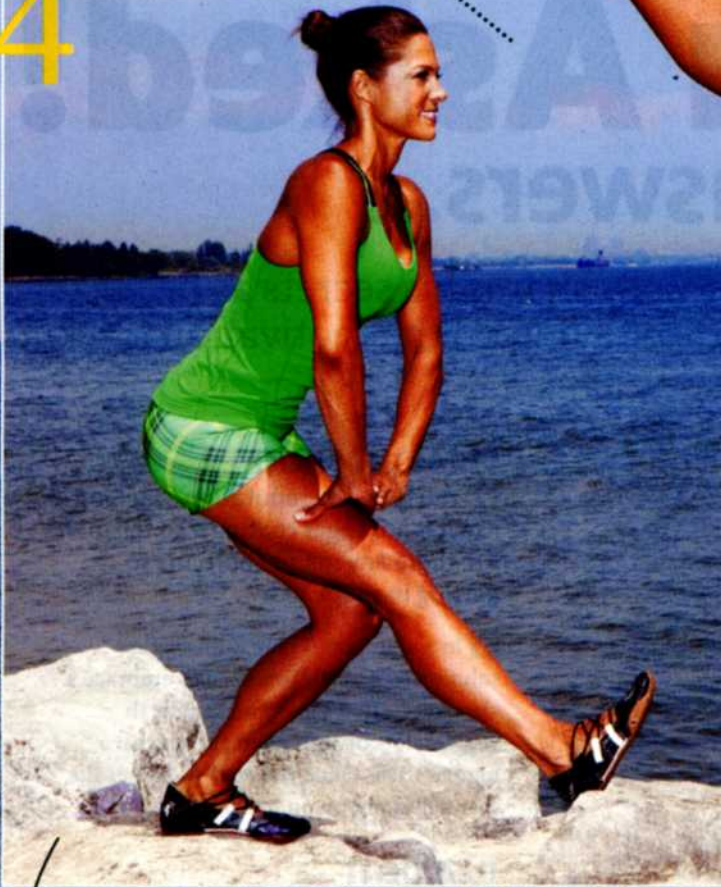
In addition to cardio and strength training, flexibility is an important but often neglected part of your fitness program. Do it every other day and reap benefits.

hamstring stretch

Target Muscles: hamstrings

Balance on your left leg and extend your right leg in front of you, foot flexed. Keep your back flat and your chest lifted as you slowly hinge at your hips and reach your chest forward to increase the stretch. Breathe deeply for 30 to 60 seconds and switch legs.

4



STRETCH TIP

The only movement in this stretch is above your hips — your lower body remains static.

side bend

Target Muscles: lats, abs, hips, back

Start with your feet hip-width apart and place your palms together overhead. Inhale and elongate your spine; as you exhale, reach to your right, keeping your chest open and your top arm aligned with your ear. Let your hips move to the left a bit. As you inhale, ease up slightly; as you exhale, deepen the stretch on the same side. Repeat four or five times, slowly, moving with your breath, then repeat on the other side. ©

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