



Supine (On Your Back) Exercises & Stretches

Log Roll, for ease of getting out of bed

Lying flat on the bed, bend the knee farther away from the edge of bed. Push off that foot, rolling the body as one unit, keeping shoulders and hips in line. Bring knees together.

Use the elbow of the bottom arm and the hand of the top arm to push the upper body upright while legs drop off the bed. Aim to have your head and feet land at the same time as you do the same motion in reverse to lie back down, and then roll as one unit onto your back again.

You can also do the log roll with both knees bent if you find that easier. Again, keep the shoulders and hips in line with each other and exhale as you push yourself upright. Use your arms to support you as you come back down, and then roll as one unit, like a log, to lie on your back.

We'll now see both versions of the log roll again. Notice that it's the combination of the weight of your legs coming off the bed along with pushing through your arms at the same that helps you sit upright.

Don't hold your breath as you come up, and always take a moment after sitting up to check in on your breathing. Make sure you feel steady before you stand up or move again.

If you are struggling with this, or if you are a caregiver or loved one trying to help someone perform a log roll, please see the Resources section on for an outsourced video on how to perform this and other assisted transfers safely.

Bridges

The muscles of the buttocks get weaker when we sit and lie down for a long time. This makes it harder to use them when we need them for going up stairs or getting up from the bed or chair and can contribute to low back pain.

Lie face up, with knees bent and feet flat. Keep your arms at your sides.

Lift your hips off the ground as high as you can, pushing into your feet and squeezing your bottom. You're trying to get your knees, hips and shoulders to form a straight line. Don't get so high up that you overarch your back. If you're doing it right, you should feel it in your bottom and the back of your leg.

Hold this position for several seconds before easing back down, making sure not to hold your breath. As it gets easier, you can extend the time you're holding the bridge.



COVID PHYSICAL THERAPY

Supine Upper Torso Twist

Lying on your back, clasp both hands overhead and turn to one side, keeping your eyes on your hands so the neck and shoulder stay in line. You can repeat this to the same side, or switch sides each time. Think about trying to stack the shoulders on top of one another while limiting how much the hips move so you get the most twist possible.

Inhale on the twist, thinking about expanding at the ribcage and the little muscles between the ribs, and exhale as you come back to center.

This exercise improves mobility at your midback, ribcage and upper body, which might feel particularly tight or stiff after spending lots of time lying down and can make it harder to get a good deep breath in.

Supine Lower Trunk Twist

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat. Drop the knees to one side, going only as far as you can while keeping the shoulders flat on the ground. Notice the ribcage expanding with every inhale as you breathe into the belly. If you can tolerate it, hold this position for a few seconds on each side. This will help stretch the mid and low back, though of course, stop if you feel any sharp discomfort. You can hold onto the bed if needed as you see here.

As this gets easier and your mobility improves, you can windshield wiper the legs from side to side more quickly, which will be more challenging for your abdominal muscles. Remember to exhale as you bring the legs to center; don't hold your breath.

Shoulder Flexion

Holding a strap, belt or towel with arms a bit wider than shoulders, bring the arms as far overhead as you comfortably can. Bring the arms back down and repeat. Take care not to arch your low back. Keeping your knees bent usually helps with this.

Our shoulders can get tight and stiff if we haven't used our upper body much while we've been ill, and this exercise can help get them more flexible again.

If you have a weaker arm or do not have a strap to use, you can clasp the hands together instead. Keep your breath steady and even as you do this exercise. Inhale as you lift the arms overhead, and exhale as you bring them back down. Again, make sure not to arch the low back; only go as far as you can before you feel that starting to happen.

You can also do this one hand at a time, especially if you're starting to incorporate weights and want to turn this into a strengthening exercise. Check the website for a list of common household items you may use if you don't have weights. When you're ready, you can challenge yourself to do the same exercise seated or standing, where the effect of gravity will make it more difficult.



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Chest/Shoulder Mobility Stretch (Supine Wall Angels)

Lie on your back with knees bent and elbows also bent. Slide upwards, extending your arms until your hands meet overhead or as close as they can. Then come back down as far as you comfortably can. Inhale as you move your arms up, and exhale as you bring them back down.

Try to keep your elbows in contact with the ground, but don't worry if your hands don't touch the ground the whole time. Also take care not to arch your back. This exercise works on the front of the chest and the shoulders, which can be tight or stiff after lying down for a long time. Loosening up these muscles can also make it easier to breathe and maintain a good posture.

Supine Marching

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat. Arms can be at your sides or wherever they're most comfortable. Bring one knee up so it's in line or just past your hip. The slower you go, the more challenging you may find this; see if you can hold the leg up for at least several seconds before switching. Make sure not to hold your breath: a good rule of thumb is to exhale through the hardest part of any exercise, which for most folks is when they lift their leg.

Pay attention to your low back as well. If you notice it's arching away from the ground as you lift your leg or is causing you discomfort, try tightening your low abs like you want to bring your belly button a little closer to your spine. You can also try tightening the pelvic muscles like you don't want to pee: the pelvic muscles connect to our deep core muscles and help stabilize us.

Side-lying Abduction

With knees bent and using a pillow or arm for head support, bring the top leg back so the knee is in line with or just behind with your hip, then straighten your leg out and point your toes down. Lift the leg up and down, trying to keep it from touching the ground if you can. If you need to start with your top leg on a pillow or on the ground and can only lift it up a little bit, that's fine. We need to start somewhere. Keep the toes pointing down and your hip and knee rotated inward: that's really important in order to specifically target the hip muscles we're looking to strengthen.

Getting these hip muscles stronger will make it easier to be steady on your feet, like when you working on standing up, walking or using stairs.

Prone hip extension

Bend the knee your foot is facing the ceiling. Lift your leg off the ground like you're trying to push the ceiling away, slow and steady. This isn't about how far up you can get in the air, it's about strengthening your back and your bottom so movement, like climbing stairs and walking, feels easier. You can also try it with the leg straight, keeping the leg close to the midline of your body, and not turning your toes in or out when you do this. Make sure there's no twisting at your back, and as always, stop if you feel any sharp pain.

If you're not comfortable laying on your belly, put a folded towel or pillow under your midsection, or do this same exercise laying on your side, taking care not to overarch your back.



COVID PHYSICAL THERAPY

Absolute Basics / The Bare Minimum

After a hospital stay or serious illness where we didn't move much, our muscles have gotten weaker, smaller and tighter, our bones aren't as strong, and it may feel like it takes way too much effort to get around. You may also feel dizzy or unwell when you sit up. The good news is that we know exercise will help those feelings and that weakness go away.

If you need some absolute basics, doing these exercises regularly several times a day will help from developing blood clots, pressure ulcers or bedsores, and contractures (or shortened, tight muscles).

Ankle pumps

Pointing and flexing the feet forward and back can help keep the range of motion in our ankles, decrease fluid buildup and prevent blood clots in our lower legs. Do this at least 10 times an hour but ideally more. Focus on going as far back and forward you can.

Heel slides

Heel slides help keep the range of motion at your knee & hip and start to strengthen your lower body.

Lying on your back with knees bent and feet flat, slowly slide your heel away from you, keeping it on the ground. Extend your leg out as far as you can! Now let's bring it back towards the body. Then switch sides. Take care not to hold your breath as you are sliding your heel in and out: a good rule of thumb is to exhale through the hardest part of the exercise, which for most folks is when they are bringing the leg back. Repeat this, keeping your breath steady and even. Oh, and as you see here, this exercise is hard to do smoothly with shoes on, so please do this in socks or bare feet and keep your movement smooth and controlled. Do as many as you can, several times a day, increasing the number you do each time as it gets easier and you feel stronger.

Rolling to one side or the other at least every two hours (but ideally more like every half hour) is an absolute must if you are not leaving your bed. When we lie in any position for a long time, we make it harder for blood to flow to our skin and tissues underneath. This causes the skin to break down, leaving wounds that can be very hard to heal.

Roll to one side, or get help to do so if needed. Stay in this position for at least 30 minutes. Roll to the other side, and stay in this position for at least another 30 minutes, but not longer than two hours. Check yourself or have a caregiver check for any areas of redness or sores on a regular basis.

As these absolute basics feel easier, or if you're looking to try some simple upper body exercises, please check out the other exercises/videos.



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Supine neck mobility and stretches

Unless there is a known medical reason for you not to perform these neck stretches, keeping the muscles of your neck and upper back flexible and feeling good is really important. It can help resolve headaches, muscle pain, stiffness, and improves your posture. Obviously if any of these stretches cause discomfort, hold off on them for now.

Start by simply turning your head from side to side, trying to get your chin in line with your shoulder as much as you can and keep your breath steady and even.

Next, lift your head like you're trying to touch your chin to your chest. Hold it for a second and then come back down. If it's hard to do, lift your head as much as you can, then use your arms to lift a little more. The added pressure of your hands might help you feel a stretch in the back of your neck or upper back.

Now, without moving your shoulder, bring your ear as close as you can towards your shoulder. Use the hand on that side to gently pull the ear closer to the shoulder. Your nose should still be pointing up at the ceiling, no turning the head. Switch sides. To get a real change in your range of motion, hold all these stretches we talk about for at least 15 to 30 seconds, even though I didn't do that here, and do them 2 to 4 times on each side.

This next one can be tricky. Point your chin towards your armpit. Put the arm on that side diagonally across your head and gently pull the towards your armpit. You can change the angle of the stretch by adjusting the position of your chin, and you might find another angle stretches different areas of muscle that need it more. Switch sides after 15-30 seconds of stretching, and as before, do this 2 to 4 times on each side. Again, keep the breath steady and even, and make sure not to hike the shoulder up on the side you're stretching, as this will make the stretch less effective.

Supine Belly Breaths

Stress and illness can change the way we breathe, and though most of us are pretty sure we've been breathing alright since, you know, we've been at it for a while, what I want to introduce to you is the idea of noticing where your breath is in your body regularly throughout the day, and trying to consciously change that if needed.

Place one hand on your chest and one hand over your bellybutton. You can do this with legs bent or straight out, whichever is more comfortable.

Take a deep breath in through your nose and focus on feeling the hand on your belly rise. When you breathe out, the hand on your stomach should lower. Less is more - you don't have to push the belly out or suck it in, just calmly breathe in and out and notice where the breath is moving the body. Try to keep your inhale and exhale the same length: three seconds in, three out, four in, four out, or whatever feels like a good ratio for you.



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Notice what happens if you're breathing into the top hand: look how much more motion and muscle activity there is. Air is still getting into the lungs, but it takes much more effort!

If we go back to belly breathing, pay attention not just to the hand on your belly, but notice if you can feel your ribs expanding at your sides, and your back pressing against the ground, expanding like a balloon or a ripple in a pond with every inhale.

There are several other techniques we intend to add to this list and to our video collection over the coming weeks and months. Please get in touch if you would like to be informed when we update these resources.