

flex time

For some athletes, reaching for gold means taking an alternative approach to stretching.

BY DANA SULLIVAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
MARKKU LÄHDESMÄKI

GET A GOLD-MEDAL BODY: chiseled abs, arms & glutes



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FOR WOMEN WHO WANT MORE OUT OF FITNESS

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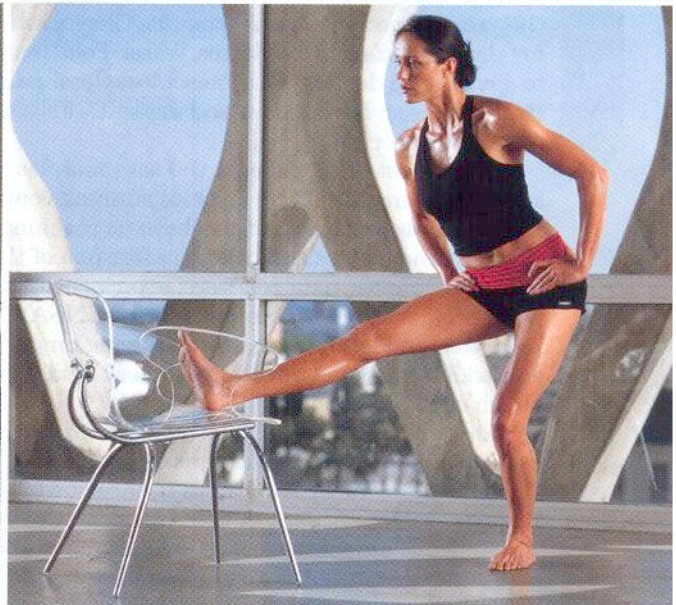
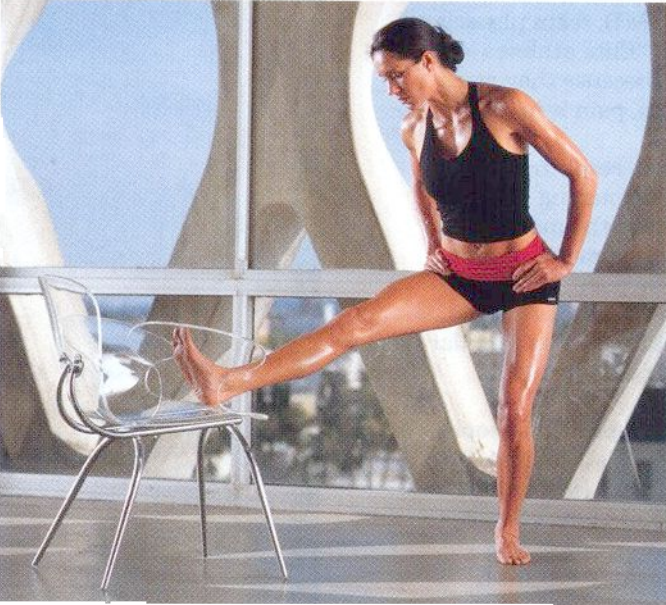
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Flex Appeal
an alternative approach to stretching

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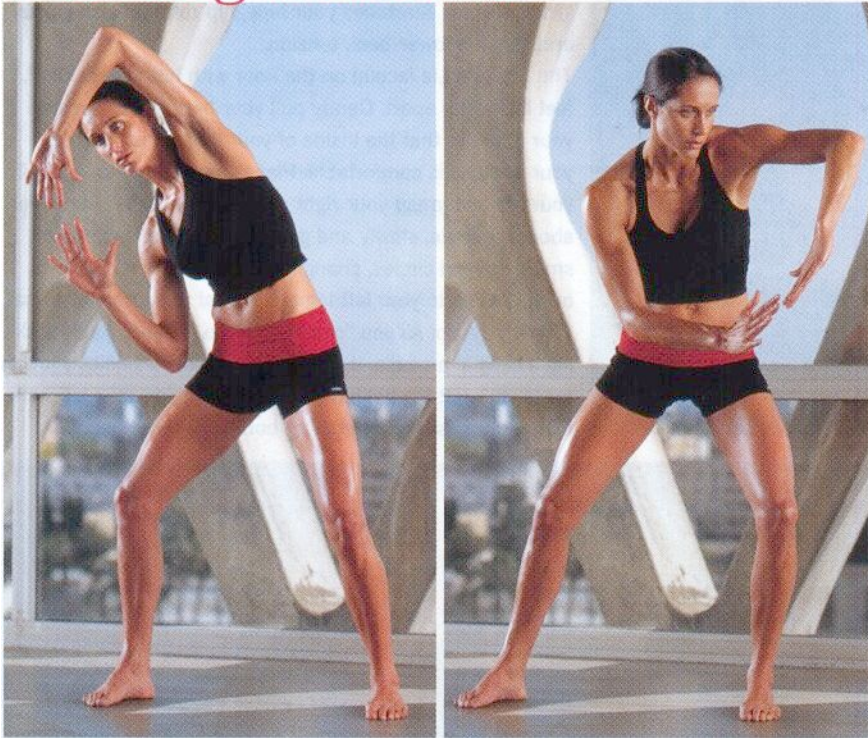
wag the dog

What It Does: Loosens the hamstrings and enhances mobility of the lower spine.

The Stretch: Prop your right heel up on the seat of a chair no higher than hip height; bend your left knee slightly. With a long spine, lean forward from your hips and reach toward your right toe, bringing your chest as close to your leg as you comfortably can. Hold for two to five slow counts. Straighten back up to the starting position and gently shift your hips back and forth, left and right, eight to 10 times in each direction. Complete two to three reps with the right leg, and then with the left to complete the set.

Mind-Body Tip: Focus on feeling this stretch in different points along the hamstring. As you shift your hips, imagine a puppy gently wagging its tail. ■

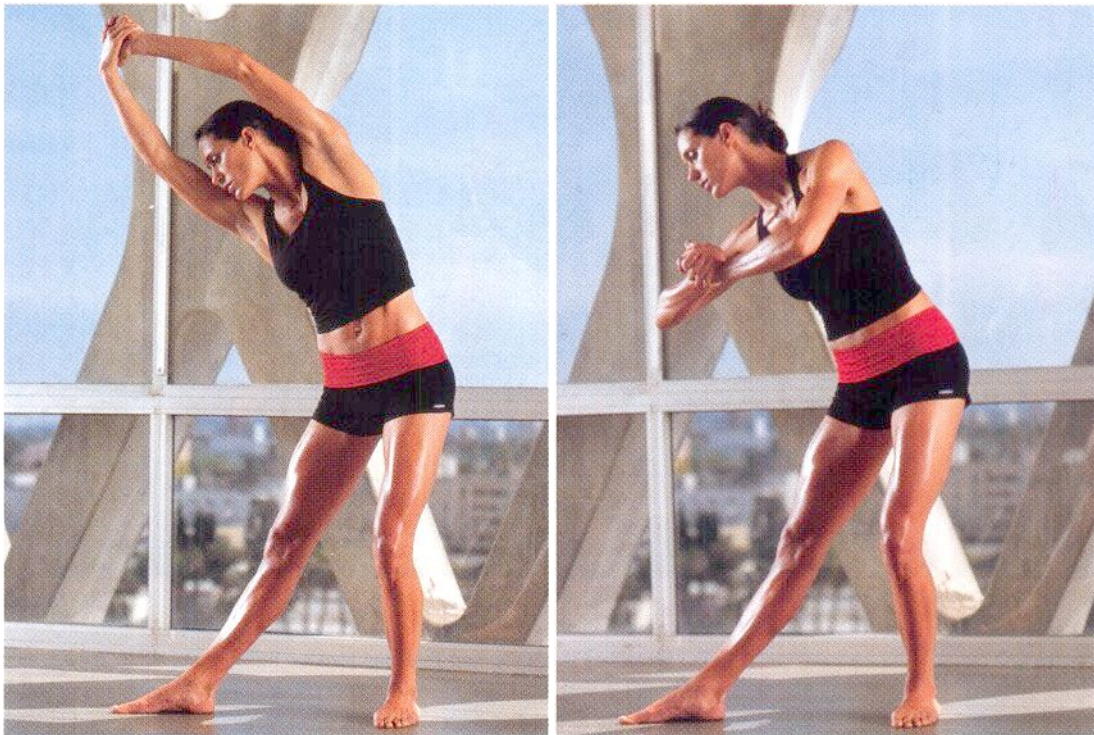
washing windows



What It Does: Relieves tension and muscle strain in the upper and middle back (rhomboids, lats and rear delts).

The Stretch: Stand tall with feet hip-width apart, navel pulled in toward your spine, and lean to the right as far as you comfortably can. Raise your arms up and bend your elbows so that your left elbow is directly over your left ear and your right elbow is near your right thigh, palms forward and fingertips of both hands nearly touching. Maintaining your arm position, slowly rotate your torso and sweep across your midline and to the left, shifting your weight onto your left foot, until your palms are facing back behind you. Retrace your path back to the starting position, shifting your weight onto your right foot. Complete five to 10 reps to the right, and then to the left to complete the set.

Mind-Body Tip: As you sweep from side to side, imagine you're dragging a wet cloth across a window with flat hands.



the bell ringer

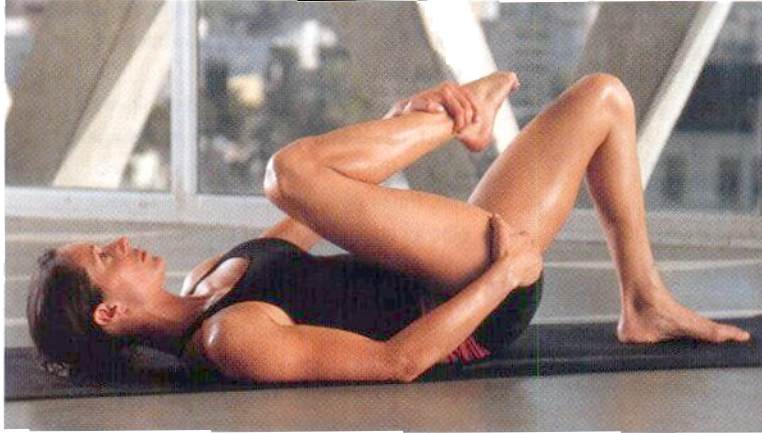
What It Does: Releases tension in the upper body by loosening the lats, spinal extensors, triceps and delts.

The Stretch: Stand tall with your feet comfortably apart, your right leg forward, left knee slightly bent.

Tighten your abs by pulling your navel toward your spine and lean to the right. Clasp your hands together, palms facing in, and raise your arms overhead. Bend your elbows and draw your hands down to your waist, slightly rotating your torso down and toward the right as you move. Stretch back up, elongating past the starting position. Perform five to six reps to the right, then switch sides to complete the set.

Mind-Body Tip: Imagine you're pulling on a rope attached to a heavy church bell. ➤

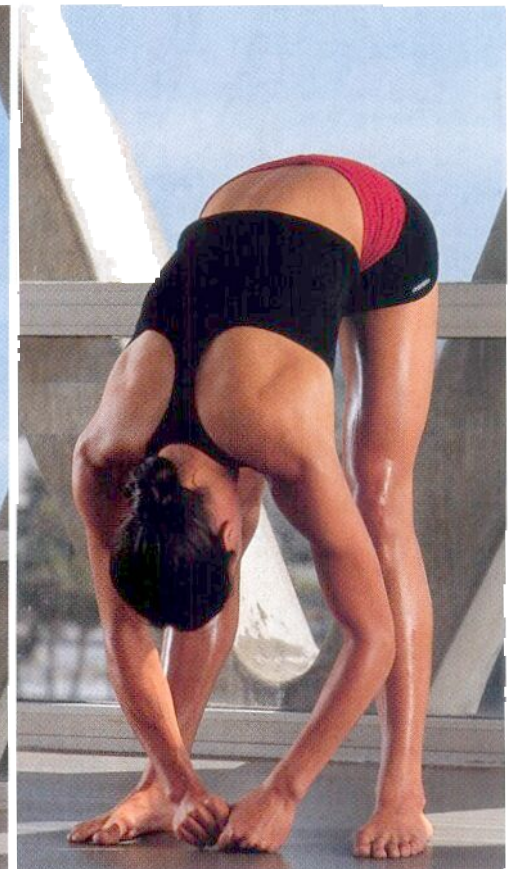
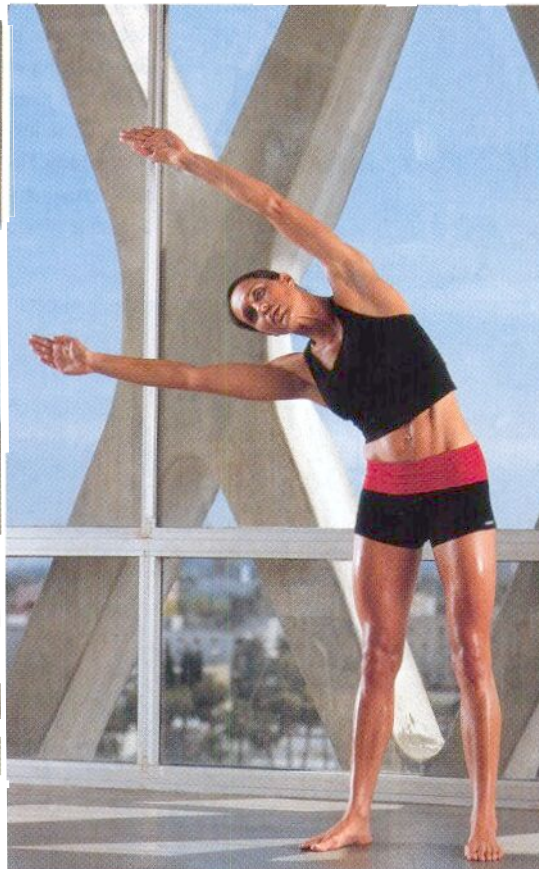
cradle stretch



What It Does: Stretches your hips, hip rotators and glutes and relieves lower-back tension.

The Stretch: Lie faceup on the floor with both knees bent, feet hip-width apart. Gently pull your bent right knee into your chest so that the inside of your thigh is as close to your body as is comfortable. Place your right palm against your hip and grasp your right ankle with your left hand. For about a minute, slowly and gently move your right hip in small, defined circles, changing direction every 10 circles or so. Switch to your left leg and repeat to complete the set.

Mind-Body Tip: As you "circle" your hip, think of gently rocking a baby in a cradle. If you have adequate flexibility, you can cross your left leg behind your right, bringing your left knee into your chest and stretching both legs simultaneously.



an unbroken
chain of
movement
through several
directions
elongates your
muscles
thoroughly
without
traumatizing
them.

the clock

What It Does: Stretches the torso and releases tension in the hips, delts, triceps and biceps.

The Stretch: Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart, knees slightly bent, abs pulled inward. With your palms facing forward, stretch your arms upward, elongating your entire body as much as possible. Hold for a count of three. Next, lean your torso slightly to the right, again elongating as much as possible and holding for a count of three. Continue doing 12, three-count stretches holding in positions that would be numbers on the face of a clock (2, 3, 4, etc.) until you have completed a circular path to the right, down toward your feet, up to the left and back to the starting position. This is one set; do the next set in a counterclockwise path.

Mind-Body Tip: Imagine that each position you hold (for a count of three) represents a numeral on the face of a clock — the first position being 1 o'clock, as you reach down toward the floor is 6 o'clock and so on. Place an equal amount of focus on each position so you get a complete, even stretch.