

# Stretch Your Way to Great Health

Our yes-you-can-do-it workout boosts energy, strengthens core muscles and – bonus – changes the shape of your body.



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**E**ver wanted to be long and lean like a ballerina? Now you can, with a unique new workout called Classical Stretch. Developed by former ballerina and TV and video exercise star Miranda Esmonde-White, the program takes stretching to new lengths, changing your shape and boosting your energy level at the same time. And in just four weeks, you can lose at least one pant size.

“Stretching changes the shape of your body,” says Esmonde-White, who has helped hundreds of people lose weight and change their shape. A trainer for the Canadian Olympic speed skating and diving teams in Montreal as well, Esmonde-White focuses her Classical Stretch program on nonstop stretching sequences that flow from one to the next – not the usual static, or nonmoving, stretches that most of us know. She describes

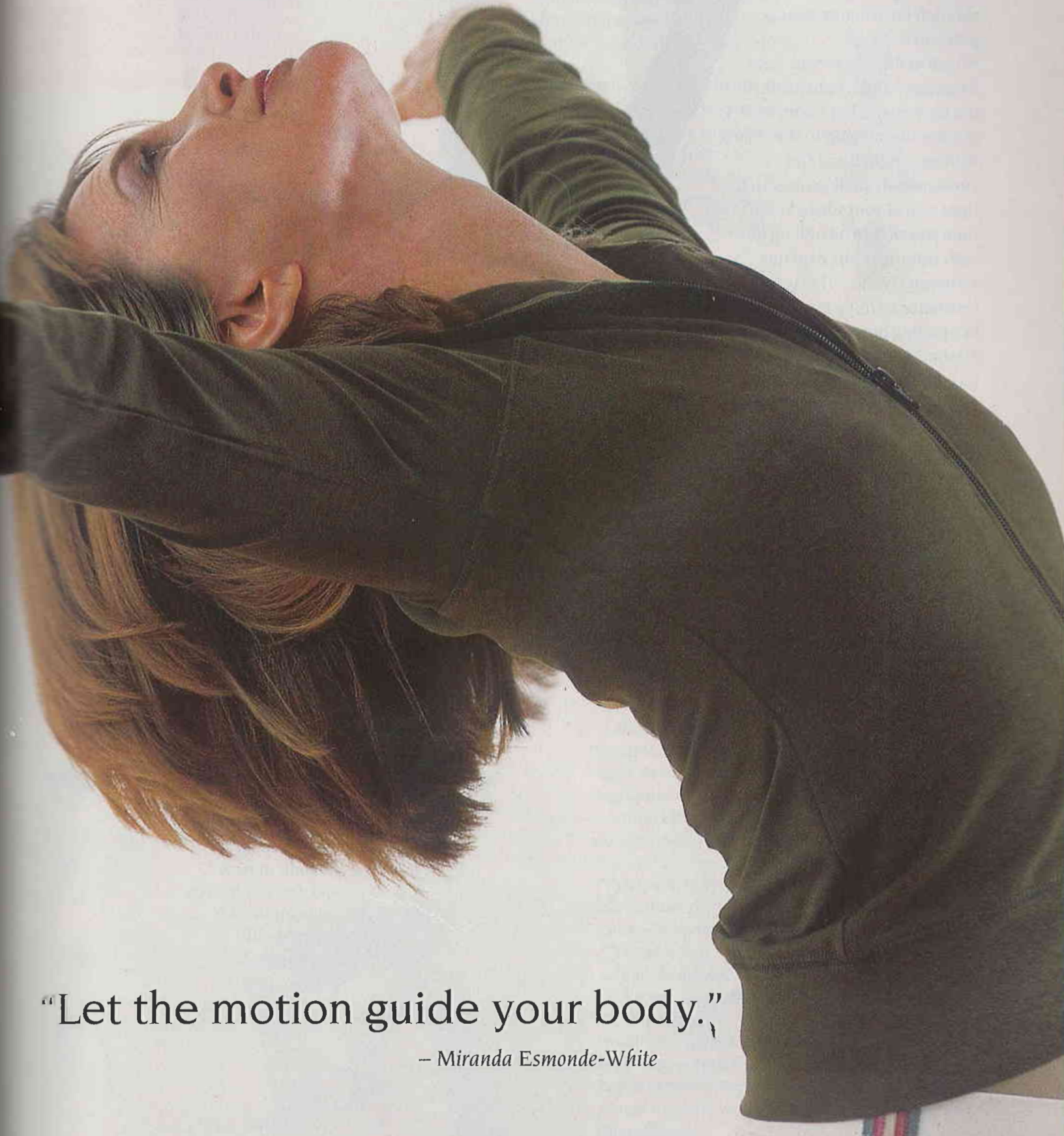
her program as “stretching in motion” and combines techniques from classical ballet, tai chi, yoga, Pilates and even physiotherapy. And rather than focus too much on specific positions during the program, Esmonde-White encourages you to let the motion guide your body.

Esmonde-White says the concept of “eccentric elongation” is key – *eccentric* meaning “strengthening” and *elongation* meaning “stretching.” Based on her years as a ballet dancer, the program strengthens and stretches at the same time, resulting in long, thin muscles; good posture; a flatter stomach; a lean waist; reduced underarm flab; and thinner, stronger thighs. The constant movement improves circulation and “shoots” oxygen into every muscle for a blast of energy. One more benefit: the resulting greater range of motion in your joints and stronger core muscles combine for a decreased risk of injuries.

Esmonde-White designed this Classical Stretch Full Body Workout specifically for *Canadian Living* Magazine readers. Anyone can do it; all you need is a clock and a towel. It targets all the major muscles of the body, and you’ll see results quickly. “If you’re out of shape,” she says, “the first time will be tiring. But try it again the following day, and you will see that it’s already easier.” Stretching is an important part of any regular exercise program, and Esmonde-White recommends you do the program three times a week.

## Before You Start

- Play background music as you do the workout. Esmonde-White’s favourites include Yo-Yo Ma, Midori, Jesse Cook, Sarah Brightman and Sarah McLachlan.
- Make sure you can see a clock with a second hand so you can time yourself as you follow the program.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and go barefoot.



“Let the motion guide your body.”

— Miranda Esmonde-White

## The Workout

- Read each exercise through once before you perform it.
- In all of these exercises, says Esmonde-White, fight against the movement. For example, if you are reaching up to the ceiling with your right hand and consequently pulling up with the right side of your torso, at the same time you should be pulling down with your right hip, explains Esmonde-White. "This type of resistance training is actually like pulling on an invisible elastic," she says. "You never go with the stretch but always pull against it."
- Before starting this new exercise program, check with your doctor to make sure it's appropriate for you.

### Warm-Up

Always warm up for five minutes before you start. This routine will get the blood flowing.

**1** Imagine you are throwing a baseball with your right arm, making sure that you activate your entire body by bending your knees and bouncing up out of each throw. Throw 16 times, changing hands each time.

**2** Imagine you are playing tennis. With your right arm, execute a large backhand, then an underhand. Pump your knees with each swing. Repeat 16 times, changing arms each time. Repeat these two exercises for four minutes total.

**3** Finish with one minute of deep breathing, inhaling for four seconds, then exhaling for four seconds.

### The Bell Ringer

**Benefits:** Thins the waist, flattens the stomach and stretches the lower back.

**Prepare:** Stand with your legs hip-width apart, knees bent, feet parallel, stomach muscles pulled in and tailbone slightly tucked under.

**The move:**

**1** Reach up and hold on to an imaginary rope with both hands and pull it as if ringing a bell. Imagine you're being suspended from the bell rope and you're being pulled up as you pull down with your arms. Your body naturally follows the flow of the bell from side to side.

**Repetitions:** Repeat at least six full rings for one minute total.

**Esmonde-White says:**

"Imagine it's a really heavy bell and the weight of it creates heavy resistance. Use a very slow, sweeping, rhythmic motion and don't rush. Each full ring should take about 10 seconds."



## Washing Windows

**Benefits:** Thins the waist, flattens the stomach, improves posture, gets rid of back flab and stretches the lumbar spine (to relieve back pain).

**Prepare:** Stand with your legs hip-width apart, knees bent, feet parallel, stomach muscles pulled in and tailbone slightly tucked under.

Round your back and raise your shoulders.

### The move:

**1** With both elbows bent and hands flat in front of you (as though they are holding a big cloth against a window not more than 30 centimetres from your body), wipe the window in a figure eight motion. As you sway left, your right arm leads up and around; as you sway right, your left arm leads.

**Repetitions:** Repeat several times for one minute total (each figure eight takes about five seconds).

**Esmonde-White says:** "Use slow, controlled, rhythmic movements and let your upper body lean into the movement as you reach to the left, then to the right. Remember to resist the movement, too."



## Plié

**Benefits:** Strengthens the legs; relieves knee pain; increases energy; firms, slenderizes and lifts the bum; and opens hip joints, making walking, running and climbing stairs easier.

**Prepare:** Stand with legs straight and feet wide apart. Keep your back completely straight.

### The move:

**1** Slowly bend your knees, forcing your legs outward as you bend as deeply as you can (your knees should be in line with the centres of your feet). You'll feel a deep pulling stretch on the inner leg. Count to eight going down, stay in that position for another eight seconds and then slowly straighten your legs for another eight seconds. Repeat four times.

**2** Repeat, but this time when you get to the bottom, contract your buttocks as tightly as you can and hold for four seconds.

**3** Repeat, but this time squeeze your thighs as tightly as you can for four seconds.

**4** Repeat, alternating the bum squeeze and the thigh squeeze, two more times before slowly straightening your legs.

**Repetitions:** Repeat this sequence four times.

**Esmonde-White says:** "Your quads, or thighs, should be really working hard. They'll be tired after this exercise."

