

Stretching your calf muscle: How to do it and why



Who is this leaflet for?

You have been given this information leaflet because you have tight calf muscle that is contributing towards pain in your foot or ankle.

Why is a flexible calf muscle so important?

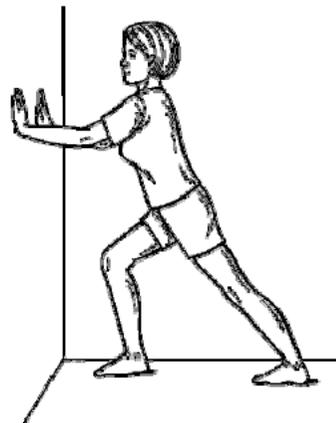
When the calf muscle has its normal amount of flexibility, it allows the foot and ankle to function properly by sharing pressure throughout the foot as a whole with each step we take. If this muscle is tight, then the foot is less able to distribute weight-bearing pressures evenly. This can cause pain.

What can I do about it?

By stretching this muscle, you will allow your foot to function more effectively. This will minimise and improve your symptoms of pain.

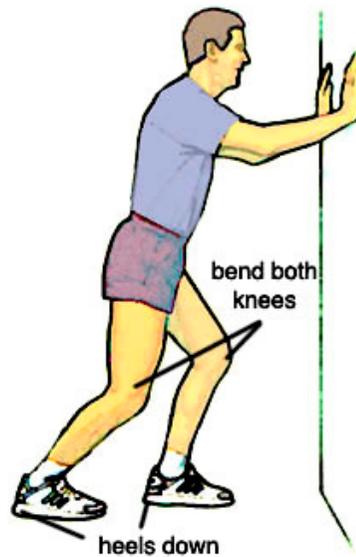
How do I stretch my calf muscle?

There are two muscles in the calf and each need stretching separately. You may be shown other versions of these stretches by a Physiotherapist. Here are some basic stretches below.



Calf stretch 1-

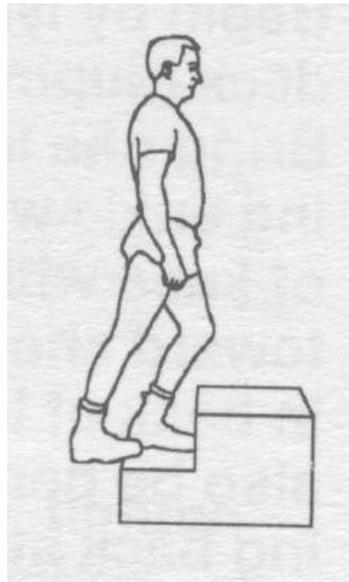
Stand with one foot in front of the other. Keeping your knee of the back leg *straight*, lean towards a wall (see picture). Feel a strong pull in the back of the back leg (in calf and Achilles tendon). Hold for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 3 times, each leg.



Calf stretch 2-

Stand with one foot in front of the other. Lean towards the wall in front of you, but now let your knee *bend* (see picture).

Feel a strong pull in the back of the back leg (in lower part of calf muscle). Hold for 20-30 seconds. Repeat 3 times, each leg.



Calf stretch 3-

Standing on a step so that the ball of your foot is on the edge of the step and your heel is off. Drop your heel down and take as much weight as you can through this leg. You may want to hold onto something while you do this.

Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each leg.

This stretch is harder than the other two above.

These are all different ways of stretching your calf muscle. You may find that you get on with some better than others. The last stretch is the more difficult stretch to do. You do not need to do all of the stretches if you do not wish to.

It is recommended that you hold for 30 seconds with each stretch, as cited with each picture so that you can gain lasting improvements in the muscle's length. You may require building up to doing a hold for 30 seconds and this is fine. Start with an amount that feels reasonable to you and aim for a 30 second hold. **DO NOT BOUNCE** as you stretch the muscle- hold slowly and steadily.

Stretching when your muscles are warm is better, such as after a walk. Stretching warmed up muscles makes them more effective and less uncomfortable. But stretching is always a little bit uncomfortable, but this should be manageable and tolerable.

How often should I do these stretches?

If you have a tight calf muscle, it is a good idea to continue to stretch this muscle every day. You might even want to do this 2 times per day to start with. This will allow you to gain improvements in muscle length, which will minimise pain in the short term. Continuing to do this means that you will maintain that improvement in the long term.

What should I do if I have a problem?

If you experience severe pain, excessive swelling, inflammation or discharge please report it to your GP. If you cannot contact your GP you should contact A&E.

Further information and advice

For further information and advice please contact NHS direct 24 hours a day on 0845 4647 or www.nhsdirect.co.uk.

You can contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on freephone 0800 7838058 or pals@dchft.nhs.uk

**Dorset County Hospital
Williams Avenue
Dorchester
Dorset DT1 2JY
Switchboard: 01305 251150
Fax: 01305 254155**

Minicom: 01305 254444

e-mail: headquarters@dchft.nhs.uk

website: www.dchft.nhs.uk

Information sheet author: A Johnston

Last updated: September 2008

Code: