

Best stretches and exercises for healthy feet

Foot exercises can help prevent foot or ankle pain, while also strengthening feet and improving flexibility. Big toe stretches, toe splays, Achilles stretches, and sand walking are some activities that may be beneficial. Regularly exercising and stretching the feet and ankles can help ensure that the muscles are providing the best support. These exercises may also increase the range of motion and flexibility in the feet, helping keep a person active for as long as possible. Most foot exercises are simple and require no complicated equipment to perform. People can do them at home or in the gym as part of a regular exercise routine.



Exercises for flexibility and mobility.

The following exercises can improve flexibility and mobility in the feet

1. Toe raise, point, and curl

This exercise has three stages and will help strengthen all parts of the feet and toes. To do this exercise:

1. Sit up straight in a chair, with the feet flat on the floor.
2. Keeping the toes on the floor, raise the heels. Stop when only the balls of the feet remain on the ground.
3. Hold this position for 5 seconds before lowering the heels.
4. For the second stage, raise the heels and point the toes so that only the tips of the big and second toes are touching the floor.
5. Hold for 5 seconds before lowering.
6. For the third stage, raise the heels and curl the toes inward so that only the tips of the toes are touching the floor. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
7. Build flexibility and mobility by repeating each stage 10 times.

2. Big toe stretch

Stretching your toes increases blood flow, which can relieve pain and swelling. Keeping your toes relaxed and flexible can also reduce your risk of injury. Most toe stretches improve flexibility and mobility. Others also increase toe strength.



The Big, or First toe, plays a vital role in our balance when standing and push-off when walking or running. Up to 90% of the control of our foot comes from the flexibility of the big toe. As we push off, our big toe needs to extend. This tightens the plantar fascia across the bottom of our foot and provides stability and shock absorption. A lack of toe flexibility leads to a loss in this stability and the muscles or joints further up the leg need to compensate. This compensation often causes problems and pain.

Keeping a wide range of motion in the big toe is important. The following exercise also has three stages and is designed to stretch and relieve pain in the toes from wearing tight shoes.

To do this exercise:

- Sit up straight in a chair, with your feet flat on the floor.
- Bring the left foot to rest on the right thigh.
- Using the fingers, gently stretch the big toe **up, down, and to the side**.
- Keep the big toe in each position for 5 seconds.
- Repeat this 5 more times before switching to the other foot.

3. Achilles Stretch

Stretching the Achilles tendon can help with a variety of issues, including:

- Pain relief: Stretching can help relieve pain from Achilles tendon issues by loosening the heel cord and increasing mobility.
- Injury prevention: Stretching can help prevent Achilles tendon injuries by increasing flexibility in the area.
- Recovery: Stretching can help with recovery from Achilles tendon damage.
- Reduced muscle fatigue: Stretching can help reduce muscle fatigue.
- Improved range of motion: Stretching can help improve range of motion.
- Lubricated joints and connective tissue: Stretching can help lubricate the joints and connective tissue.



The Achilles tendon is a cord connecting the heel to the calf muscles. It can strain easily, but keeping it strong may help with foot, ankle, or leg pain and tightness.

To do this exercise: Face a door frame or any vertical surface. Place one forefoot against the vertical surface with your heel firmly planted on the floor.

1. With your other leg and also using your hands, bring your hips forward and stand up straight until there is a stretching feeling in the backs of your lower calf muscles and big tendon behind the foot and ankle.
2. Hold for up to 60 seconds before switching sides. Repeat three times each side.
3. *Another variation:* Face a wall and raise the arms so that the palms of the hands are resting flat against the wall.
4. Move one foot back, keeping the knee straight. Then, bend the knee of the opposite leg. Keep both the heels flat on the floor.
5. Push the hips forward until there is a feeling of stretching in the Achilles tendon and calf muscles.

Exercises for strength

The following exercises can help enhance the strength of the feet.

4. Toe Splay



Toe splay refers to the ability of the toes to spread out and separate from each other. It may seem like a simple movement, but many people can't get their toes to splay actively. This is usually because we spend so much time in socks and shoes that don't leave room for the toes to splay.

Toe splay creates a wider base of support for balance and stability during standing, walking, and running. Proper toe splay allows for forces to be evenly distributed throughout the foot. This allows for better shock absorption and prevents excessive pressure on areas of the foot that can't handle that pressure. This can help reduce injury but also increase efficiency during walking and running.

To do these:

1. Sit in a straight-backed chair, with the feet gently resting on the floor.
2. Spread the toes of both feet apart as far as possible without straining. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
3. Repeat this motion 10 times.
4. Once a person has built up their strength, they can try looping a rubber band around the toes. This will provide resistance and make the exercise more challenging.

Working to maintain toe splay through mobility and strength exercises helps to increase the strength of our feet, making them more resilient to injuries. Strong feet can also load and unload forces much more efficiently, resulting in faster running.

5. Toe Curls

Doing toe curls is a great exercise to strengthen the feet. This exercise can stretch and flex the foot to improve your balance, support your arches, and increase your overall foot strength. Toe curls can also help reduce or prevent the pain from foot injuries, such as plantar fasciitis. To do this exercise, sit in a chair, lay a towel on the floor in front of you, and place your foot flat on top of the towel. Keeping your heel still and planted on the towel, lift up your toes and use them to scrunch the towel towards you. Repeat this movement five times on each foot.



The towel curl exercise stretches and flexes the foot to improve balance, support the arches of your feet, and increase overall foot strength. The curl can also help improve toe strength, which is beneficial for balancing.

To do this exercise:

1. Sit up straight in a chair, with the feet flat on the floor.
2. Lay a small towel on the floor in front of the body, with the short side facing the feet.
3. Place the toes of one foot on the short side of the towel. Try to grasp the towel between the toes and pull it toward oneself. Repeat this exercise five times before switching to the other foot.
4. To make this exercise more challenging, try weighing down the opposite end of the towel with an object.

6. Marble pickup



Doing the marble pickup can increase strength in the muscles on the undersides of the feet and toes. This exercise is good to prevent heel pain and stiffness in the feet. It will keep the feet and toes flexible. It is also especially beneficial for runners and dancers. The purpose of the marble pickup exercise is to stretch and strengthen the muscles around the ankle. This is also a great exercise to get the toes moving and increase general mobility in the fee

To do this exercise:

1. Sit up straight in a chair, with the feet flat on the floor.
2. Place an empty bowl and a bowl of 20 marbles on the floor in front of the feet.
3. Using only the toes of one foot, pick up each marble and place it in the empty bowl.
4. Repeat this exercise using the other foot.

Keeping your feet strong and flexible can help reduce foot and ankle pain, reduce muscle soreness, improve your overall foot health, and keep you active. Exercises that improve range of motion and help limber up your feet may reduce your chance of getting hurt. Slow and gentle stretches will improve your flexibility. Strength exercises will allow your muscles to provide better support and protection for your foot as a whole.

You can do these gentle stretching and strengthening exercises three days per week or as often as every day - while checking your phone or on a conference call - to start to increase your range of motion and strength for lifelong foot health and vitality.

7. Sand walking



Walking barefoot on sand is a great way to stretch and strengthen the feet and calves. This is a good exercise in general because sand's soft texture makes walking more physically demanding.

To do this exercise:

1. Head to a beach, a desert, a volleyball court, or any other location with sand.
2. Remove the shoes and socks.
3. Walk for as long as possible. Try increasing the distance slowly over time to avoid overexerting the muscles in the feet and calves.

Exercises for pain

The following exercises can be helpful for foot pain relief and foot tightness.

8. Toe extension



The toe extension is useful in preventing or treating plantar fasciitis, which is a condition that causes pain in the heel when walking and difficulty raising the toes. Stretching your toes increases blood flow, which can relieve pain and swelling. Keeping your toes relaxed and flexible can also reduce your risk of injury.

How to perform these toe exercises:

1. Sit up straight in a chair, with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Place the left foot on the right thigh.
3. Pull the toes up toward the ankle. There should be a stretching feeling along the bottom of the foot and heel cord.
4. Hold for 10 seconds. Massaging the arch of the foot while stretching will help ease tension and pain.
5. Repeat this exercise 10 times on each foot.

9. Golf/tennis ball roll



Gently rolling a tennis ball under your feet can offer many benefits, including relieving foot pain, improving mobility, enhancing circulation, reducing stress, and boosting overall function. This can also help relieve discomfort or a feeling of tightness in the arch and ease pain associated with plantar fasciitis. Rolling a ball under the foot is a manual soft tissue manipulation technique. It improves circulation and stimulates blood flow to the arch. Reduces cortisol levels and relaxes and loosens muscles and ligaments that are tight and constricted which aids in recovery and healing. The message effect briefly numbs pain signals from nerves in the foot.

To do this exercise:

1. Sit up straight in a chair, with the feet flat on the floor.
2. Place a tennis ball, or a golf ball for firmness, on the floor next to the feet.
3. Lay one foot on the ball and move it around, pressing down as hard as is comfortable. The ball should be massaging the bottom of the foot.
4. Continue for 2 minutes, then repeat using the other foot.
5. A frozen bottle of water or a can of peas can be a soothing alternative if the fascia is inflamed and irritated after a long day on your feet. The coldness and massaging action helps calm inflammation.

9. Achilles Stretch



When the Achilles tendon is inflamed, it can tighten and cause discomfort. The runner's stretch, or [calf stretch](#), will provide relief by loosening the tendon.

To do this exercise, you'll need a wall or other support, such as a chair.

1. Place your hands on the wall or chair. If using a wall, put your hands at eye level.
2. Step the leg you want to stretch behind you. Keep your back heel on the floor and point your toes straight ahead.
3. Bend your other knee toward the wall, keeping your back leg straight.
4. Lean toward the wall until you feel a gentle stretch in your calf. Don't lean so far that you feel pain.
5. Hold for 30 seconds. Complete 3 reps.

If it hurts to straighten your leg, try a runner's stretch with bent knees. Start closer to the wall and bend your back knee until you feel a stretch. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat three times.

Foot health and safety tips

To help keep the feet strong and healthy:

- Complete a thorough warmup routine before exercising.
- Wear supportive footwear for day-to-day activities and sports.
- Replace worn-down shoes as often as possible.
- Build up strength and flexibility slowly to condition the feet and ankles.
- Avoid uneven surfaces, especially when running. Try not to run uphill too often.
- Listen to the body. Do not overdo activities.
- Prevent any recurrence of injury by resting and seeking appropriate treatment.

Summary

Keeping the feet and ankles healthy is a good idea. Performing the exercises above can help ease existing pain, prevent discomfort, and reduce the risk of injury.

People with a diagnosed foot condition such as plantar fasciitis or strain to the Achilles tendon may wish to try exercises to help.

Always check with a healthcare professional, if possible, before starting a new exercise and stretching routine.