

Foot Stretch and Strengthen Exercises

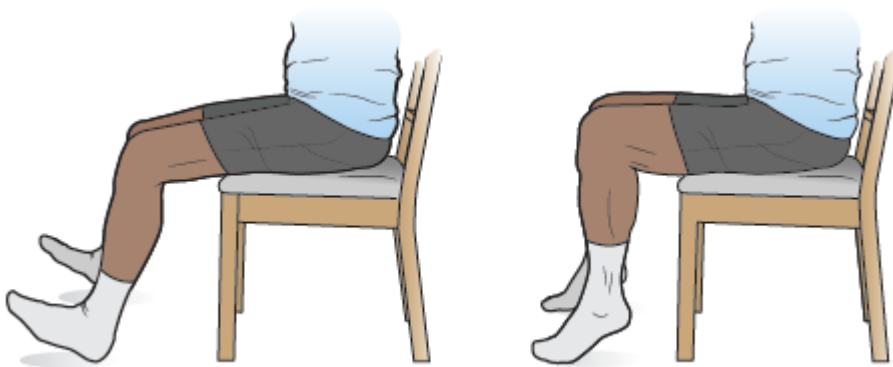
Stretching the soft tissue (tendons, ligaments, muscles) in the foot is an important benefit in any daily movement. Tight feet can lead to less flexibility and make you more prone to injury. Regular foot exercises will help to enhance blood circulation, which can have a positive impact on your overall cardiovascular health. Moreover, as your feet and lower limbs become stronger, you will experience better posture and alignment, reducing strain on your joints and spine.

Foot strength is especially important for balance, posture, and locomotion. Toe muscles contribute to stability, especially when leaning forward, and provide sensory information to the central nervous system that helps maintain balance. Toe strength also plays a role in gait speed and controlling lower limb movements that can lead to falls. *In fact, weak toes are considered the biggest predictor of falls in older people.*

Here are 3 beneficial foot, toe and lower leg stretching and strengthening exercises you can do anywhere, without equipment. All of these exercises can be done barefoot, socks on, or with shoes on – however you and your feet are comfortable.

1) Heel Raise / Toe Raise

Sitting upright in a chair with your feet flat on the floor and under your knees, raise your heels together as high as possible and hold there for 2-3 seconds. Drop heels back to the floor, pause, then raise your toes and forefoot as high as you can, hold for 2-3 seconds. This is 1 repetition. Repeat 10 times and this equals 1 set. Start out doing 1 set daily, and try to be consistent! Later on, work up to two sets, everyday.



If you find it quite difficult to elevate your toes or get the balls of your feet off the floor, slide your feet forward about 2 to 4 inches and this will help to improve your toe & forefoot lift.

2) Strengthen your feet with this 3-Position Heel Raise

This exercise is an excellent leg/ankle/foot strengthening exercise that increases your lower extremity stability and improves your balance. Keep looking at your feet to make sure they stay in the position you have placed them in. Try to perform this 3 position heel raise exercise everyday!

- Stand with your feet placed pointing forward, a little spaced and your back straight.
- Lift your heels off the floor and stand on the balls of your feet, hold for 2 seconds, then back down. Repeat ten times.
- Stand in the same position, but point your toes outward, a toes-in stance. .
- Lift your heels up 10 times, as you did the first set.
- Finally, turn your heels toes-out and repeat the exercise 10 times.
- You have completed 1 set of 30 repetitions..



3) Standing Wall Stretch (Achilles Stretch)

Very effective exercise to stretch & loosen a tight Achilles (big tendon behind upper heel & lower leg), also the plantar fascia (our inside arch ligament), as they are interconnected. Daily Achilles stretches enhance ankle mobility, reduce tightness, and prevent injuries like tendinitis or plantar fasciitis by keeping the calf and heel flexible. These stretches are crucial for increasing greater stability & balance, improving gait, aiding recovery from exercise, and supporting overall lower leg function.

Stand facing a door jam, wall or any firm, vertical surface. Both sets of toes are pointing forward. Place 1 foot in front of you, resting the heel on the floor and toes elevated as the picture shows. Using both your arms and your opposing leg, bring your hips forward and stand upright, tall and keep your back straight. You will feel the muscle and tendon tightness in the back of your lower leg, below your knee. Don't overdo it - feel the tightness without the pain. Hold for 30 seconds, then switch legs and stretch the other the same way - this is 1 repetition. Do 3 repetitions per side and this is 1 set. Try to do these sets daily, working up to twice daily after a couple of weeks of once daily. Your sense of stability and balance while rising from seated, standing, and walking will improve very noticeably after a couple of weeks of consistent, daily execution!

