

The No BS, ASAP Leg Flexibility Routine

Are you tired of doing generic flexibility routines that seem to deliver barely any progress, even after months of dedication?

I set this routine up in a fashion that would mean anyone could pick it up and be successful. This isn't an empty promise – you'll have to work hard to see results – but if you do, I give you my word that you'll see them faster than you thought would ever be possible.

It is the most time-efficient, effective, incremental routine I managed to create. It is, also, one hell of a workout – so you'll definitely see results in other areas, like muscle tone and core!

The full contents of this program include two separate documents:

A cheat sheet, where the routine *per se* is detailed.

This reference sheet, where you can find explanations to all the exercises, the routine itself, as well as a lot of extra information I believe you'll find valuable and that I deem necessary to your success.

Thank you,

F. A. B. Sampaio

Disclaimer and Introduction

I am not a professional coach or physiotherapist so take everything I say with a grain of salt. Carefully digesting fitness advice is paramount to the success of your fitness journey, because, on one hand, there are a lot of people on the internet spreading misinformation, and, on the other hand, most practices and methods in almost any field of thought and science (sports included) are bound to be replaced by better ones as time goes on. **I believe it to be of your best interest to experiment with other stretches and fine-tune these to your needs. But I'm fairly confident you will stay pretty close to the original program ;P**

I decided to create this flexibility program in an effort to combat the rudimentary methods that so frequently pervade flexibility training. I found that misconceptions and old-fashioned training were prevalent in the dance community and I've come to realize that they extend, in fact, much beyond that sport/art. Since I started doing ballet from a very inflexible state (a young male adult, could be worse, yet I was in a clear disadvantage relative to all the girls), I felt those inefficiencies to a greater magnitude than most.

For instance, it's quite common for flexibility training to borrow elements from yoga. Keep in mind that **I see great value in most flexibility-focused hobbies/lifestyles, like yoga**, and I am in no way carelessly disregarding the many other benefits of these practices, **but I defend that most yoga routines, like many others, are extremely time inefficient when it comes to improving flexibility.** Why? Here are the two greatest flaws that I see with most flexibility training.

- **Many flexibility routines include what I'd call "transitional exercises"**. These are all the superfluous exercises that allow you to catch your breath in a barely stretched position. **They tend to take a lot of time**, maybe up to 20/25% of your workout and provide little to no contribution to your flexibility. If relaxing is your priority, they make a lot of sense. If improving your flexibility is your priority, they're not useful.
- **Many popular stretches are, in fact, really low quality.** It's extremely common for a stretch to put you in a position where, for instance, balancing is the priority, and you can also find, frequently, exercises where you barely feel any improvement over the duration of the exercise. By contrast, **you can find other stretches that feel very intense and extremely effective.** Combined with the superfluous exercises that I mentioned above, what commonly happens is that the routine repeats several low quality stretches before going for the higher quality ones. **Why not just do the latter?**

Since I wanted to get certain signature stretches (for example, the splits) as soon as possible, I tried to fine-tune my flexibility workouts as much as possible. This is my best attempt at putting it all together in the form of a program/workout.

Workout Structure and Aim

The workout is divided into four blocks. These pertain to different “signature stretches” or “**skills**”, which are **stretches/poses that could be seen as standalone achievements**. Thus, and **each block is constituted by a number of exercises that work towards improving the same skill**. They are:

1. **Side splits.** This block focuses on hip flexor and hamstring flexibility.
2. **Pancake.** This block focuses on hip mobility and keeping an anterior pelvic tilt when stretching your adductors.
3. **Middle splits.** This block focuses mostly on adductor flexibility and mobility, as well as abductor strength.

The program is aimed at **any person** with beginner and intermediate level flexibility who wants to increase it! I define the different levels of flexibility as:

1. **Beginner:** you have mediocre to poor flexibility, you can do most stretches, but might not even be able to reach your toes.
2. **Intermediate:** you consider yourself decently flexible, but are unable to do any of the signature exercises, with the possible exception of one or two, which you do with mediocre form.
3. **Advanced:** you can all of the signature stretches with sufficient form.
4. **Contortionist:** the signature stretches are a piece of cake. Your back bends over 90 degrees and all your splits go far beyond 180.

This program was developed specifically to get you to a low advanced level as fast as possible, independent of starting point. Naturally, the lower your starting point, the longer it should take you. If you are at an advanced or contortionist level, this is not for you. I will be creating a program for those specifically, if I see there is demand for it.

Each level only has one flexibility workout. This is because all stretches tend to make the next stretch easier, so throughout a workout you just move from one block to the next. The order of the blocks is what I personally advise you to follow and is very deliberate.

I have included modifications and tips on how to make exercises feasible for those with very little flexibility. Despite that, **these are not easy workouts**. The difficulty isn't in being able to do the stretches, rather in their intensity. Most stretches here give you plenty of leverage to work hard, so results are highly dependent on personal effort. If you choose to work hard, you will feel it every second :D

About Frequency

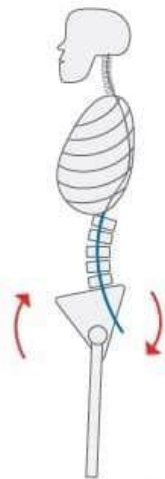
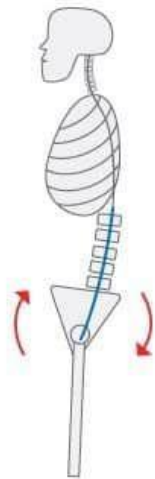
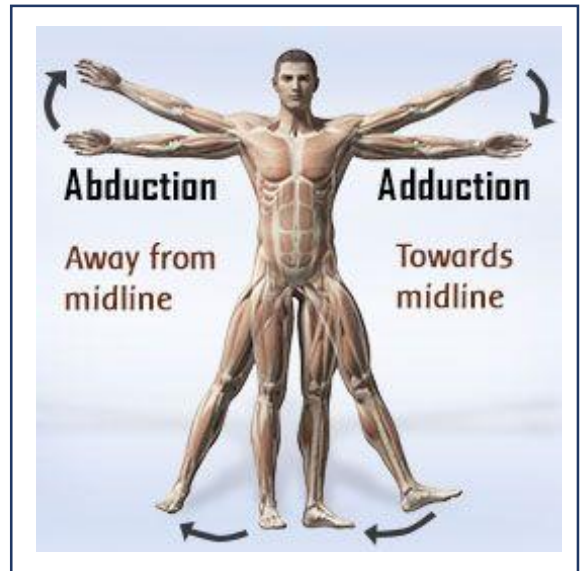
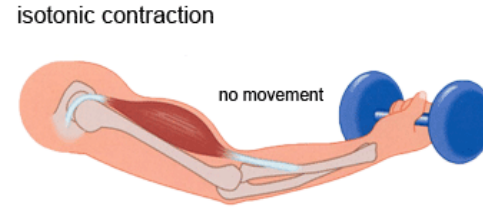
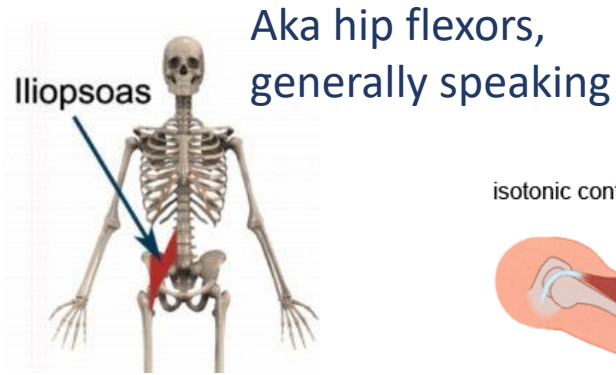
It is very common for flexibility practitioners to claim that you have to stretch every day in order to achieve the best results. I believe that is both true and false, in a way:

- **If you do not stretch every day, you will be going almost 48 hours without stretching.** If you stretch intensely and carry a sedentary lifestyle, that could make your muscles stiff and harder to stretch the next workout.
- However, flexibility is not exclusively about stretching. You have to condition your body to hold a certain pose, where your joints are in a position of vulnerability. Therefore, strength and endurance are vital parts of a flexibility routine, and no stretch can be properly intense without significantly tiring your muscles. **Taking a day of rest is extremely important** and, in my experience, I found my best results when I did not do the routine every day. **When doing my routine every day, I found myself plateauing quickly and harshly.**

So what is the verdict?

My recommendation is that you do this flexibility routine 3 to 4 times per week, and mobilize your muscles and joints on the rest days. This can be done by doing some mobility work or the stretches you feel you are having the hardest time improving. On these off days, you are not looking to push past your limits. Instead, just get near to your maximum flexibility on these stretches, do them for a lesser portion of the time you would in the routine, and rest. In the cheat sheet, I provide you with some guidance on what to do on off days.

Relevant Anatomy Cheat Sheet



Posterior Pelvic Tilt Posture

Neutral Spine Posture

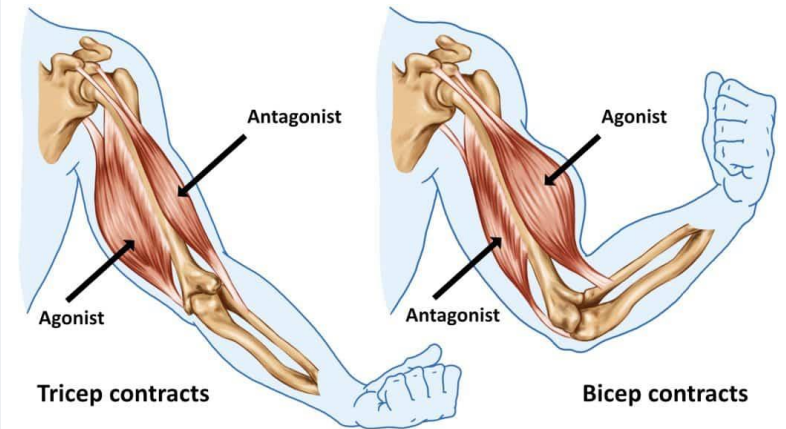
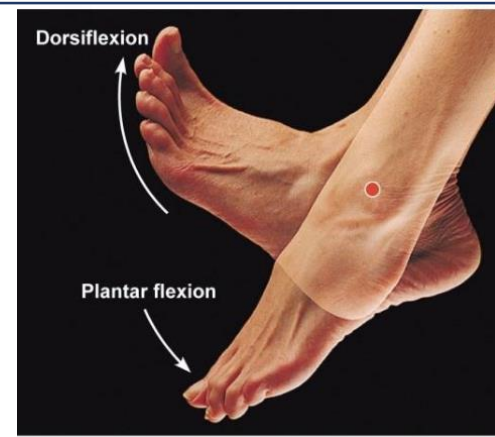
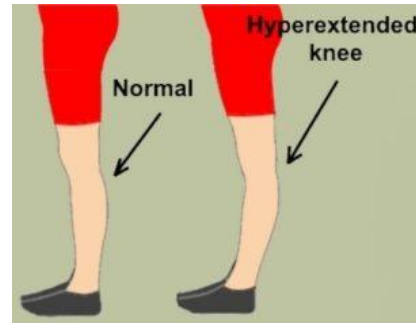
Anterior Pelvic Tilt Posture

As the pelvis rotates backward the lumbar spine adopts a more flexed (kyphotic) position.

In this position the pelvis is close to level and the lumbar spine has a slight inward (lordotic) curve.

As the pelvis rotates forward the lumbar spine adopts a more extended (hyper-lordotic) position.

Engage your glutes and core to tilt your pelvis in a posterior fashion.
Engage your lower back to tilt it in an anterior fashion.



In an **antagonistic muscle pair** as one **muscle** contracts the other **muscle** relaxes or lengthens. The **muscle** that is contracting is called the **agonist** and the **muscle** that is relaxing or lengthening is called the **antagonist**.

General Stretching Tips And PNF

Some tips that apply to several exercises. They help with ensuring you do things safely and to greater effect.

1. Focus on **keeping your core engaged**, especially when bending your back backwards. Pushing your abs against the spine is a great cue to provide proper support to it. This is very important and will protect you from any injury.
2. You should **prioritize contracting the glutes** in exercises where you have to stand on your feet/legs. Examples: splits, barre hamstring stretch, back bridges. Inhaling and exhaling can contribute differently to your stretches. It is generally easier to force a deeper stretch while exhaling. When inhaling, you should try to hold the same stretch. So, **breathe in to maintain a stretch, breathe out to go lower**. This is a common practise in yoga, where you attempt to relax and let go when you breathe out.

For exercises where it's harder to progressively get into a deeper position, **using a PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation) technique can yield amazing results**. PNF techniques are the latest tendency in stretching.

Generally speaking, **when you are stretching, you are putting your body in a position of significant vulnerability** – this causes the nervous system to try and prevent you from improving ROM (range of motion), because it is “afraid” you could injure yourself – and, technically speaking, it isn't wrong. Therefore, you want to show your nervous system that you are in complete control of the body in those positions of great vulnerability, and you do it by actively contracting and, thus, strengthening the muscles and neuromuscular activity in those positions, which is what PNF techniques look to achieve.

Here are two of the most commonly used PNF techniques (personally, I prefer the first one and I also think it is the one that works best with the routine):

1. **PNF CR (Contract-Relax)**: position yourself in a pose where the target muscle is stretched. Now, contract the muscle for 5 to 10 seconds, with movement being impeded by heavy resistance, an object, the floor, your own body, a wall, a partner, a combination of them, etc. This shouldn't be a very intense contraction and, if the muscle is stretched, you should feel that it is naturally harder to get a strong contraction. After the contraction, you relax the muscle and try to get into a deeper stretch, for 10 to 30 seconds. Time is highly dependent on your preference and personal experience. Repeat the process for a number of times.
2. **PNF CRAC (Contract-Relax-Antagonist-Contract)**: Identical to PNF CR, except, now, you'll be contracting the antagonist muscles after the period of relaxation. Because the agonist muscles are in a stretched position, the antagonists should be in a heavily contracted position. Contracting them here will lead to a significant cramping feeling, so you follow up the CRA by either doing a contraction phase or repeating the entire process for the complementary opposite stretch.

Exercises where I think PNF is most appropriate are marked with a small **PNF**.

Glute Stretch / Pigeon Pose

The glutes are the largest, most powerful muscles in a balanced physique, which also means they require a rather long stretch in order to stretch the innermost parts of them. This is why all glute stretches, for all levels, have, at least, a 120s stretch. Fun fact: tight glutes are one of the most common root causes for lower back pain, so stretch away!

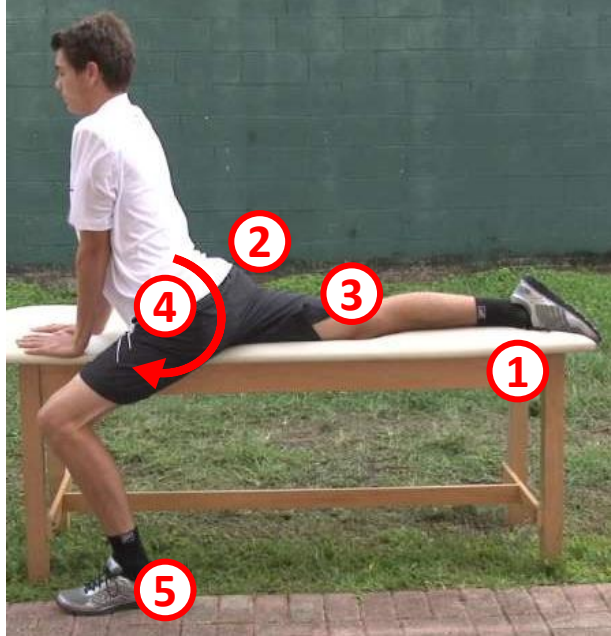
1. Your front leg should be making a 90deg angle, in order to hit your glutes as hard as possible.
2. Most people shouldn't be able to get, right away, a pigeon pose as deep as this. One of the advantages of this pose is that you can use your own weight as well as the front leg as leverage to push your hips into the ground.
3. Here, you really don't want to let your hips rotate externally. Keep that back leg hip as close to the ground as possible.



4. From that position you want to fold over your front leg, using it as leverage if necessary, and getting as close to the ground as possible. It's normal if you can't get very close to the ground.
5. Her front leg is bent. That's not what we want! Keep it perpendicular.



High Ground Passive Lunge Into Quad Stretch PNF



This exercise is divided in two parts. The first is a hip flexor stretch and the second a hip flexor and quadricep stretch. I see this stretch performed only very rarely – it could be the setup (the elevated surface) imposing some restrictions – and I find it completely nonsensical. For people who are yet unable to do the front/side splits, this is THE SINGLE BEST hip flexor stretch. I believe it should be most people's go to hip flexor stretch, it's incredibly easy and effective, it combines complete stability with a ton of leverage to get instant results, bar none.

1. Place your back leg on an elevated surface. A bed or a couch work best, because they give typically have arms/ends that you can use as leverage with your hands. You should be in a position akin to a passive lunge, except your legs are at different elevations.
2. Try to combat excessive turning of the hips – keep them relatively squared. Your objective is to keep the high ground hip as close to the surface as possible.
3. The back knee doesn't have to be straight at all, because the stretch is passive. This is one of the greatest advantages of the stretch, since keeping the back leg straight is a major concern when stretching the hip flexors that can take a lot from the exercise.
4. You want to force a posterior pelvic tilt as much as possible and tilt your body back, while twisting it to the side of the low ground leg. You can even extend your high ground arm to the front and your low ground arm to the back.
5. As you get better and better at the stretch, you can start to progressively reducing the elevation differential – unless the elevated surface has variable height, a simple trick is to gradually stack small objects, like books, under the low ground foot. Remember, keep the high ground hip touching the surface!
6. Once you're done with the hip flexors, you can take advantage of the stretched position and bend the high ground leg, grabbing the foot and bringing it as close to your butt as possible, without sacrificing the hip flexor stretch too much. It should look similar to this picture, except you're still in the same setup as the high ground stretch.
7. I'm sorry.



Lying Leg Band Stretch PNF



This exercise is quite simple. However, it is VERY uncomfortable, when done correctly. The advantage of doing it lying is that you can focus entirely on keeping the knee straight while going for maximum dorsiflexion (the most uncomfortable part).

1. You start by stretching with the leg right in front of you. All you have to do is stretch the leg, straight, by pulling on a band or by pulling the leg directly if you have the flexibility (quite advanced). Elastic bands are fine, but a rigid textile is much more appropriate if you want to use a PNF technique.
2. The key here is to keep your leg as straight as possible. If your knee can go into hyperextension (negative bend), do it, as long as you don't feel any sharp pain.
3. After you do this stretch, do the same, except this time you'll turn the leg to the opposite side, while turning your head to the leg's side.
4. You can turn your head to the other side here, to also mobilize your spine. Keep in mind that doing so will make it impractical to do the PNF CR technique.
5. The twist can be done in exactly the opposite way, that is, by rotating the body to the side of that leg and using its weight to stretch.
6. Grabbing your leg and doing a lying side split is the ultimate goal (advanced).

Barre Hamstring Stretch **PNF**



You can do this exercise over any kind of elevated surface (the higher the surface, the harder the stretch, so keep it low if you have trouble doing it). It is the number one exercise for getting a great, deep stretch, to prepare the side splits. Unlike a floor hamstring stretch, balance is not a problem and stretching is much more deliberate. By grabbing onto the elevated surface or your leg, you can stretch as much as you can. Not only that, squaring the hips is not a concern here, as long as you're getting as deep a stretch as you can. Feel free to increase the duration if you feel the results. Finally, if you did the leg band stretch before this one, you won't have to deal with that discomfort while stretching your hamstrings.

1. Keeping the back knee straight is very important to reinforce proper side split technique.
2. Push your elevated leg down, while getting your body as close as possible to it.
3. Focus on pushing your stretching hip back and your lower back down against the leg, forcing an anterior pelvic tilt as much as possible. This will take the stretch away from your back and into your hamstrings, which is exactly what we want here. Keep your core tight and push your abs against your back to make sure they are taking the brunt of the load.
4. As you get your leg up into and down from the elevated surface, try to keep the back leg straight during the whole process.

High Lunge



The point of this exercise is to warm you up for the side splits, as well as reinforce certain technical aspects.

1. Keep the body as upright as possible, if not very slightly arched to the back.
2. Your knees should be over the ankles, slightly forward.
3. Focus on pushing your hips down and forward, to deepen into the stretch.
4. Keep your knee as straight as possible! Both pictures here show the knees slightly bent, which is a mistake. We want to reinforce keeping the back knee very straight, for the side splits.
5. This is what a very deep high lunge looks like, and is what you should strive to achieve.
6. Her hips are slightly rotated to the side, which you should avoid, but isn't a problem *per se*. If your hips tend to open too much, try rotating your body to the opposite side, like in the third picture.



Front Split / Side Split

SKILL



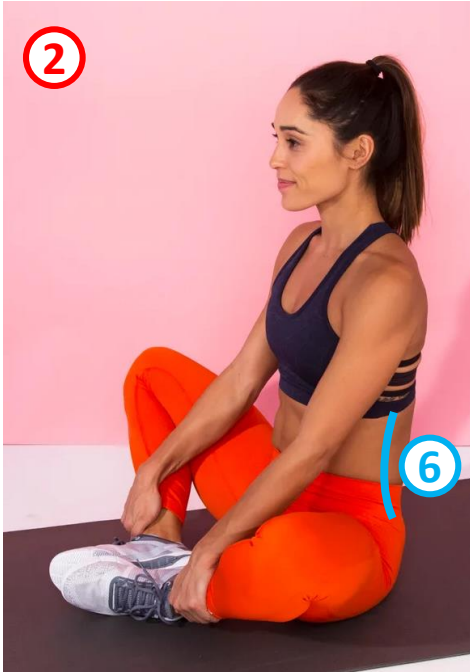
PNF

Some call this the front split, some call it the side split. I'm not exactly sure which term is preferable. Regardless, there's a reason this exercise is so popular: when done perfectly, it is a comprehensive demonstration of leg flexibility and strength. Flexibility because we'll be stretching (above all) the glutes, hamstrings and hip flexors, strength because getting the split the right way requires you to gradually build leg endurance and strength. So it is the first **skill** you'll be working towards.

1. Start by moving your feet away from each other, pointing your back foot and supporting yourself with the help of your hands. If you cannot get low enough to use your hands, do the exercise next to an object you can leverage yourself off of (like a couple of chairs on our sides).
2. Keep the back knee **AS STRAIGHT AS POSSIBLE**. The lady in the picture should straighten it more. I really cannot stress this enough. If going lower means bending the knee, don't go lower for as long as you can and then lower your knee to the ground and continue the exercise in a passive fashion.
3. Front knee is also as straight as possible.
4. Keep your back foot pointing (plantarflexion), because once you do get the split, your foot will be pointing regardless. You can place the front foot however you wish.
5. It is not mandatory to keep your hips squared, but don't let them turn too much. If you feel like they're getting a bit out of hand, rotate your torso the opposite way, extending your arms to the opposite directions of their respective legs. This should deepen the stretch.
6. When trying to go lower, alternate between folding forward over your front leg and bending yourself back towards your back leg (focus on pulling your abs against your spine to make sure it's protected).
7. This is what a person with very little flexibility would look like practising the splits. Just keep at it!
8. Once you get the split, you can start playing around with things like simultaneous quad or hip flexor stretches. Obviously this picture is for showing, but she should straighten her front knee. Notice how her arms are extended in the opposite direction of her legs, to deepen the stretch.



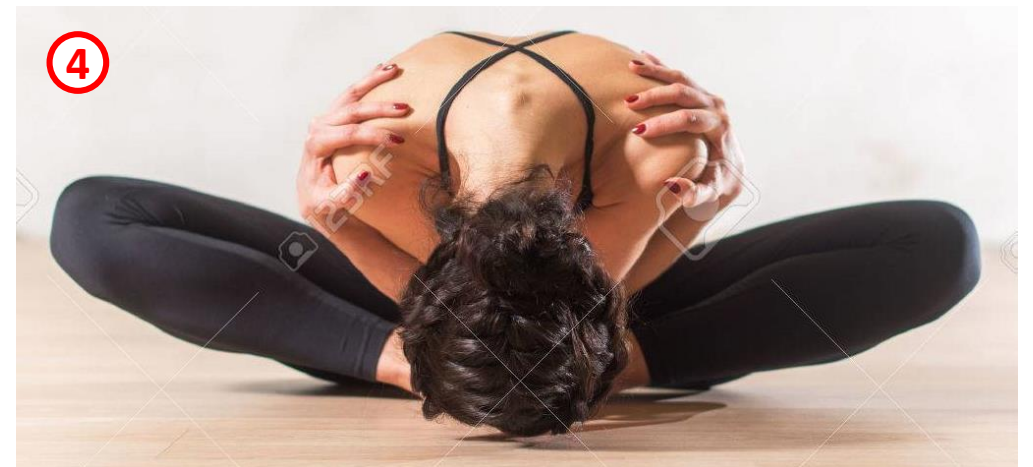
Loaded Butterfly PNF



This is a relatively simple stretch that will improve hip mobility and stretch your adductors. It is a brilliant exercise to get ready for the pancake and the middle split.

The main catch about this stretch is the setup – many people have a hard time getting into the position and holding it altogether.

1. The best setup is to sit with your back against a wall, preferably in a place where your feet friction against the floor, which will help you hold the stretch.
2. Now, you simply pull your feet together as close to your pelvis as you can. Take a couple of tries if needed.
3. From here, you want to alternate two phases. The first is a loading phase, where you want to hold an isometric contraction while pushing your knees down while trying to close your legs as hard as you can (some people like using weights, like a pair of 5kg / 10lbs dumbbells, but I prefer to use my hands). Hold it for about 10 seconds. The second is the stretch itself, where you want to release the adductors and contract your glutes, pushing the knees down with the help of the load.
4. Once you can place your whole legs on the floor, you can start working in some progressions, such as folding over your legs. Do not lift your knees, like the lady in the picture.
5. Even when folding, try not to get into a posterior pelvic tilt, since stretching the lower back is not the objective.
6. You could also do the opposite, that is, lie down while maintaining the position, but other stretches (mainly, the frog) will already be targeting that same disposition.



Posterior To Anterior Assisted Straddle

One of the major technical difficulties when practising the pancake is holding an anterior pelvic tilt. This exercise is a great way to reinforce proper technique.

1. (Optional) Place a resistance band around your feet and behind your back, assisting you in opening your legs to your maximum. Keep in mind that the lady in the picture has great flexibility. It's normal if you can barely get 90 degrees.
2. Grab something that is either heavy (a weight, some furniture) or is pulling you forward (a resistance band, like in the picture).
3. From here, keeping your hip flexors as tight as possible, you want to alternate between a posterior and an anterior pelvic tilt. You do this by alternating between a forward straddle fold, as deep as you can, into straightening your whole back, while holding the resistance. Take some seconds in each position, maybe a couple of breaths, to ensure quality and emphasize the movement.
4. Keep your core as tight as possible throughout the whole exercise. Remember to pull it against the spine.



Pancake

SKILL



The pancake is an easy to understand stretch, and definitely a **skill**, albeit quite demanding.

1. The number one thing to watch out for is the back. You want to keep an anterior pelvic tilt as much as possible.
2. Engage your glutes to spread your legs as much as you can.
3. Keep your abs tight and close to your back.
4. Don't let your hands touch the floor – if you keep them from barely touching it, your weight will naturally bring your body lower, so stay strong!
5. Consider using a band for assistance. A great equipment-free alternative is doing the pancake with your butt slightly elevated.
6. Some people like doing plated pancakes. I personally am strongly against them if you are a beginner or intermediate.
7. This is what a an average pancake looks like.
8. This is what a really good pancake looks like.

Straddle Side Stretch

This is a follow-up to the Pancake. You come up to a straddle (middle split if you have the flexibility), and you reach to the side, while slightly turning your torso up and looking to the sky. This last motion is very important, because it helps open up the anterior chain and the thorax. At the same time, you'll be stretching the legs. Do not let your arms touch the ground, you want gravity to help you get lower. The lady in the picture is of an advanced level, so don't worry if you stop short halfway.



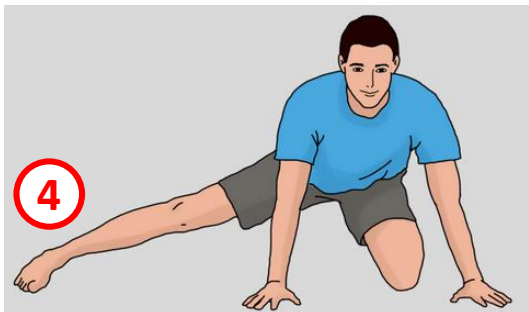
Frog PNF



The frog is a very simple stretch. Here's how you can make it better:

1. Extend your arms in front of you and place your hands as far as you can. This will load your hips more heavily, which will help you go lower.
2. Use the hands to help you push the hips back. The harder you push, the stronger the stretch.
3. An alternative way to do the stretch (that some people prefer), is to bring your hands very close to your hips and stay more upright, that is, as if you were sitting like a frog. The stretch should be very similar provided you keep your back bent.
4. Focus on keeping an anterior pelvic tilt.
5. But keep your core engaged, to prevent excessive bending of the lumbar spine.
6. This is what a beginner's frog pose might look like. Once again, to get a more effective stretch, extend your arms in front of you so most of the weight is on your legs.
7. This is a relatively advanced frog pose.

Fire Hydrant Extensions Into Adductor Stretch PNF



As I've mentioned before, progressing in your middle split requires you to teach your body that you are ready to get into a deeper stretch. The best way to do this is to develop strength at the vulnerable position and fire hydrant extensions are a great way to do this.

1. Start from a traditional fire hydrant position.
2. You're going to extend your leg out, to the side and slightly to your front, while raising it up as much as you can. It's perfectly fine if you rotate your hips for this exercise, as long as the torso is somewhat squared. After you hold your leg out for a second or two, go back to the fire hydrant position. Repeat for a number of reps. If keeping the fire hydrant position is too hard, you can bring your knee to the floor between reps.
3. Focus on keeping an anterior pelvic tilt.
4. From here, you can lower your straight leg and remain the rest of the duration in an adductor stretch pose. A nice way to intensify the stretch is (let's consider that the right leg is extended and the left knee is on the floor) to extend the right arm far in front of you, like in the frog pose, and to extend the left arm to your left, using it to help you push your hip to the right and slightly to the back, stretching the adductors and reinforcing the anterior pelvic tilt.

Middle Split **PNF** **SKILL**



After stretching the hamstrings, the hips, working on your pancake, etc., you should be more than ready to try to go for your maximum middle split. Don't be fooled – seemingly simple, the middle split is a **skill** that combines flexibility, mobility, strength and endurance – it is extremely demanding to the body and to the central nervous system (since it requires a lot of focus) if done properly. Additionally, it puts your muscles and joints in a really vulnerable spot, so it can even be dangerous if done carelessly – remember that discomfort is OK and expected, sharp/acute pain never is. Because of this, training your middle split intensely is going to inevitably break down tissues in your legs, which is something we want, so we can strengthen and lengthen your leg muscles and other tissues. We cannot, however, submit our body to this powerful of a stimulus on a daily basis.

I prefer to train the middle split in two ways, first, by standing vertical and assisted by some object/furniture, second, by getting the arms and elbows down on the floor.

The first one is for getting the seated split, whereas the second is for a lying split. In a way, what you're trying to do is get a full middle split on both sides of the legs, that is, front and under.

1. Your feet can be positioned in two different ways – either to the side or to the front. When doing the first variation, your feet can be positioned both ways, but you have to be careful not to turn your knees in. When doing the second variation, pointing your feet to the front should be more intuitive.
 2. The first variation is very simple to understand, you just need something you can help yourself with. This is also the easiest variation to load your split, because your weight is directly above your legs.
 3. When doing the second variation, focus on pushing your hips back, to the point where you feel like you're almost losing balance and your butt is going to fall back and hit the floor. I recommend you start by doing this with a wall behind you, a foot away, to give you some spatial feedback.
 4. The second variation looks very similar to a pancake, but notice how the knees are pointed forward instead of up.
- For both variations, remember:
5. Keep your legs as straight as possible, because this stretch can be very taxative on the knees if they aren't fully extended.
 6. You hold yourself up by focusing on contracting the glutes. When doing PNF contractions, obviously, the adductors will be taking some of the load, but you should do your best to keep the glutes as engaged as possible.
 7. Keep your core engaged, as always.
 8. Remember to not roll your shoulders too much, try to maintain good posture.
 9. Try to reinforce an anterior pelvic tilt. This might make it harder to contract the glutes, but do your best nonetheless.

You're done for the day!

Thank you.

F. A. B. Sampaio