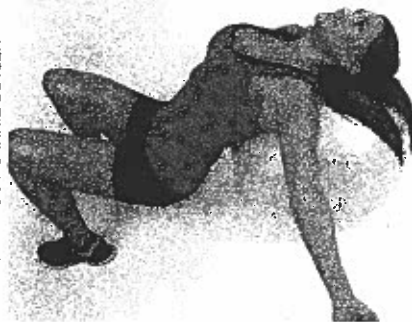


Stretches for Positive Aging

Do you know that one of the most effective, inexpensive and pain-free ways to look and feel younger is to exercise and perform daily stretches that ward off kyphosis (rounding of the thoracic spine, resulting in a hunched shape); that keep the spine mobile; that lengthen the quadriceps to help sustain a tall, lifted posture; and that maintain a healthy range of motion in the hips?

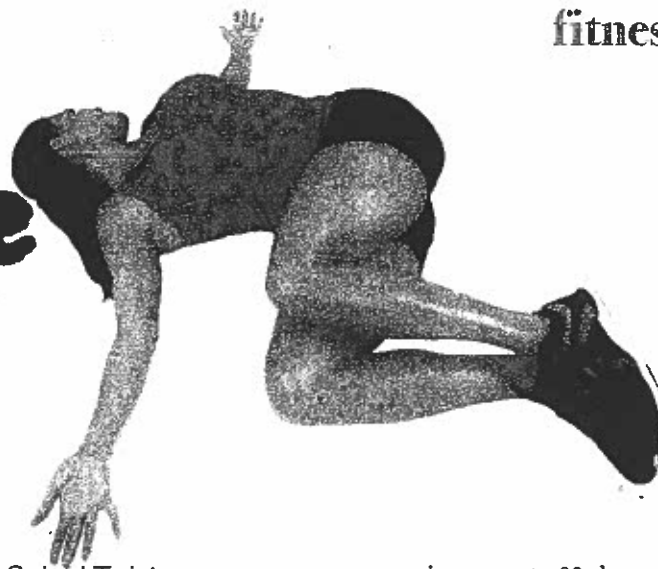
Shift your focus from "anti-aging" to "pro-aging" with these stretches that support an active body over a lifetime. Christy Stevenson, an AFAA-certified instructor and FITOUR ProTrainer, who teaches, trains and supervises at American Fork Fitness Center in Utah, explains the stretches.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARRIE BUTLER



Stability Ball Chest Opener

Sit on stability ball of appropriate size, feet planted on floor a little wider than hip width apart. Slowly roll down onto back while walking feet forward. (If you lack core strength, anchor your feet, toes touching wall.) Ball fully supports spine. Open arms straight out to sides, palms up. Allow back of head to rest on ball, and draw chin up slightly toward ceiling. Drop hips, allowing low back to round naturally against ball, or keep legs and glutes engaged to lightly lift hips. Inhale and exhale fully while holding the stretch, softening shoulder blades into ball.



Spinal Twist

Lie supine on mat and hug knees to chest. Next, take arms out to sides, palms up, shoulders anchored to mat. Slowly drop knees toward right side as head turns left. Release trunk rotators as legs sink toward floor. Actively press shoulders down; hold and breathe.

Extend both legs straight out to side to intensify this stretch, lengthening hamstrings as spine continues to twist gently. After 10–30 seconds, activate core muscles to return to start position. Return to neutral spine, and then stretch to opposite side.

Quad Wall Stretch

Position mat flush to flat, smooth wall. Carefully place right knee on floor against wall, shinbone perpendicular to floor, toes pointed. Bring left foot forward



to create 90-degree bend in left knee, making sure knee stays behind toes, as if in lunge. Right shinbone is just *outside* of right thighbone as you press hands into left thigh and rise to tall, one-legged kneeling position. Use core muscles to draw rib cage back toward wall and up over hips. (This stretch is deep; if you struggle, do a standing quad stretch instead.) Breathe deeply and hold for 10–30 seconds; then switch sides.



Seated Hip Opener

This stretch can prove challenging for people of all fitness levels. Sit cross-legged, then gently take right lower leg and try to pull right ankle/foot toward left knee. Breathe deeply and press right knee downward toward left ankle/foot. Activate inner and outer thighs to press both knees closer to mat. (If you have tight hips, you can sit on step or yoga block. If you have mobile hips, you can reach forward and down with arms and chest.) Hold for 10–30 seconds, breathing fully, and gently switch sides. ■

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