

# Stretching exercises

This information is general exercise information for people with RA and may not suit all individuals. Your healthcare professional is the best person to advise you on what activities are suitable for you depending on the severity of your condition and your treatment plan.

Stretching exercises may help you strengthen your muscles, improve your posture and maintain flexibility, and the great news is that stretching has proven benefits for people with RA. If you experience morning stiffness, gentle stretches under a warm shower may help. A stretching program should be done consistently, targeting different parts of the body and different movements so that the whole body is stretched and moved daily.<sup>1,2</sup> Below are a few stretching examples:



## Neck turn

- Facing forwards, keep your shoulders down and tilt your head sideways, towards one side, until you feel a gentle stretch on one side of your neck. Hold for 5 seconds. Return your head to the centre and repeat on the opposite side.



## Overhead shoulder stretch

- Link your fingers together and raise both arms above your head with your palms facing to the sky.



## Crossover shoulder stretch

- Raise your arm in front of you and move it across the front of your body. Place your hand on your elbow and pull your arm further across your body. Your elbow should be slightly bent, not locked.



## Wrist stretching

- Straighten one arm out in front of you. Pretend your fingers are the tip of a pen and trace alphabet letters in the air. Try not to move your arm. Just bend at your wrist.



## Hand strengthening

- Turn your hands over, palms facing up to the sky. Try to touch your thumb to the base of your little finger. Then relax. Try to tap the base of each finger with your thumb. Repeat five times.



## Foot stretches

- Keeping your heel on the ground, pick up a towel or cloth by scrunching it between your toes. Repeat this 10-20 times, but stop if you start to feel any signs of foot cramping.
- Sit down and rest the arch of your foot on a round object (e.g. a tennis ball). Roll the arch in all directions for a few minutes.

**References:** **1.** Arthritis Foundation. Building a walking workout. Available at: <https://www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/exercise/workouts/walking/walking-works.php> [Accessed June 2021]. **2.** Arthritis Australia. Taking control of your rheumatoid arthritis. Available at: <https://arthritisaustralia.com.au/types-of-arthritis/rheumatoid-arthritis/> [Accessed June 2021]. **3.** Rheumatoid Arthritis.net. Stretching and range of motion exercises. Available at: <https://rheumatoidarthritis.net/exercise/stretching/> [Accessed June 2021]. **4.** Versus Arthritis. Neck pain. Available at: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/neck-pain/>. [Accessed June 2021] **5.** Arthritis Health. 3 essential shoulder stretches to manage arthritis. Available at: <https://www.arthritis-health.com/blog/3-essential-shoulder-stretches-manage-arthritis>. [Accessed June 2021]. **6.** National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (UK). Exercise videos. Available at: <https://www.nras.org.uk/exercise-videos> [Accessed June 2021] **7.** WebMD. Flexibility Exercises to Help Your Rheumatoid Arthritis. Available at: <https://www.webmd.com/rheumatoid-arthritis/features/flexibility-exercises-for-ra#2>. [Accessed June 2021]. **8.** Versus Arthritis. Foot and ankle pain. Available at: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/foot-and-ankle-pain/#Exercises-to-manage-foot-pain>. [Accessed June 2021].