

## Back Stretch

## Level 2 / Posture 22

### Benefits:

Loosens & Strengthens Lower Back & Shoulders; Loosens Hamstrings; Strengthens Abdominals.

**Time to Do:** 3 - 6 minutes

**Body Parts Used by This**

**Posture:** Lower Back, Hamstrings, Abdominals & Shoulders (a little)

**Warms You Up for:** Spider, Shoulder Stand, Dog

**Builds you up for:** Leg Stretch,

Leg Over, Leg Clasp, Chest Expansion, Chest Expansion Extension, Shoulder Stand, Spider, Dog, Sun Salutation

**Combines Well with:** Incline Plane

**Energy Center Used:** Solar Plexus & (somewhat) Belly & Heart

**Alternative Pose:** If you're belly gets in the way of doing the Back Stretch, try doing the Leg Stretch.



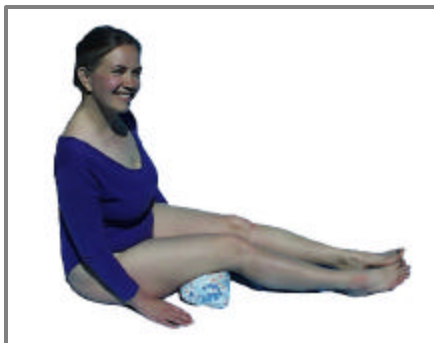
Here's a pose that will be familiar to you if you're into athletics. (You might know it as the hamstring stretch.) This is a good, all purpose stretch. It strengthens and loosens the lower back, loosens the hamstrings and the shoulders. We'll use it a lot to notice how breathing affects the stretch, to pace our breathing and to enjoy meditation in motion. All of these will help you discover the mind-body connection that yoga promises.

### Start

Sitting

Legs together, outstretched

**Tip** Many beginners, people with back problems and people with tight hamstrings, find it hard to be comfortable sitting this way. That is quite normal. It will take time to build up the muscle strength and flexibility to find this position more natural.



**Tip** To be more comfortable sitting this way, try "sitting on your bones". That is, once you're sitting, hike one leg and hip back a "step". Then hike the other leg and hip back a "step" to match the first. See how that feels different?

**Tip** If your hamstrings are tight or if you have a "bad back", bend your knees a bit or prop your knees up by putting a cushion under your thighs.

**Safety Tip** Be sure your feet and knees are facing upward, not rolled to the side. If your feet roll to the side, your



knees will roll sideways, too, which will put too much stress on your knees when you're in the posture.



### Now you're ready for the Back Stretch!

Stretch your arms high above your head. Have your hands meet.

**Key** Stretch as high as you can, reach up with your entire body, arms & hands. This will give you a good stretch and will elongate your spine.

**Key** Keep your spine elongated (stretched fully) throughout the posture for the most benefit.



Bring your entire body & arms forward, keeping the stretch in your back and arms.

**Tip** Imagine your waist is a hinge & you're folding it shut, (that is, bending from the hips).

**Tip** Do not hunch over. Think of this as your hips coming closer to your thighs.





Touch down, as far down your legs as you can, but not to the point of pain. Your back still feels elongated.

**Safety Tip** Watch for burning or pain in the lower back or hamstrings.

Keeping your back stretched, (elongated), loosen your arms, slide them back to hold onto your knees.

Open your elbows.

**Tip** Keep your elbows open. This will give you more room to breathe.



**Tip** Hold on firmly to your knees. This will keep you from bobbing up and down as you breathe in and out. and so will help you improve the stretch.

**Hold 6** breaths

**Tip** Relax your shoulders and arms while you hold the pose.

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**You Will Feel It In** Your lower back & your hamstrings

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### Release

Sit up. Return your hands to your lap while your body lets go of the stretch.

Do 3 – 6 Repetitions of this stretch



Hold on a little farther down your legs with each repetition.

**Encouragement**

- ? This is a very useful pose, but it can be difficult if you're round bodied or pregnant. If your tummy won't let you do this, a good substitute is the Leg Stretch, which stretches one leg at a time. That pose will allow your body to rest to one side of the leg and make the stretch possible!
- ? This pose is very do-able in public, such as under a tree or on the beach. People don't think it strange. Maybe that's because it looks like the familiar hamstring stretches that joggers do.

**Breathing**

Breathe in, stretching arms up  
Pause

Breathe out,  
folding body  
forward



Continue breathing out,  
bringing hands to grip the knees / legs

**Hold**  
breathing in & out 6 times

**Release** Breathe in, sitting up



**Common Errors**

**Allowing the feet to roll to the side**



**Hunching shoulders and upper back forward**



Keep your neck lined up - straight with your back.



**Not opening the elbows.**

(This especially tends to happen when holding on farther down the legs.)



**Not gripping with the hands**

**Bobbing up and down** as you breathe in and out. Gripping with your hands will help prevent this.

**Starting too far down the legs** for the first hold.

(Starting at the extreme position.)



Start at the knees and work your way down. This will loosen you up to get better extension, more safely, at the end.

**Reaching too far in the last repetition** to allow the upper body and arms to be loose. Only go as far as you can with shoulders relaxed and elbows loose and open.

