

## Leg Stretch

## Level 2 / Posture 23

**Benefits:** Loosens & strengthens lower back & shoulders; loosens hamstrings

**Time to Do:** 5 - 10 minutes

**Body Parts Used by This**

**Posture:** Lower back, hamstrings & shoulders (a little)

**Warms You Up for:** Spider, Shoulder Stand, Dog, Leg Over, Chest Expansion, Chest Expansion Extension, Shoulder Stand

**Builds you up for:** Spider, Shoulder Stand, Dog, Leg Over, Chest Expansion, Chest Expansion Extension, Shoulder Stand, Back Stretch

**Combines Well with:** Half Moon

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

**Alternative Pose:** If you're in a rush, you might want to do the Back Stretch instead.



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. It's easier on the back than the Back Stretch, is a nice addition to routines for pregnant women & goes well in combination with the Half Moon; but it takes twice as long to do as the Back Stretch. 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.

## Yoga Snack

This pose is very do-able in public, such as under a tree or on the beach. People don't stare or ask you if you need a doctor. Maybe that's because it looks like the familiar hamstring stretches that joggers do.



### Start

Sitting

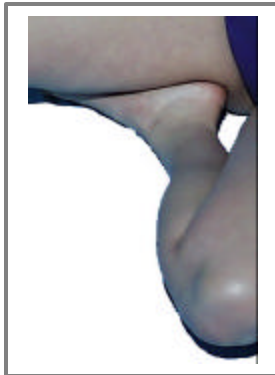
Legs together, outstretched

**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.

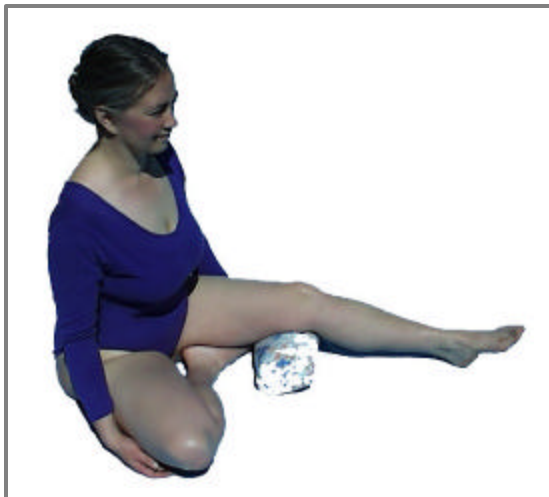
**Tip** To be more comfortable sitting this way, try "sitting on your bones". That is, once you're sitting, hike one leg and hip back a "step". Then hike the other leg and hip back a "step" to match the first. See how that feels different?

## Getting a good starting position

Tuck one foot against the other thigh. If this is difficult for you to do, you can simply sit with you legs slightly apart.



**Tip** The closer to your groin you tuck your foot, the stronger the stretch will be. That is, to make the pose easier, tuck your foot farther down your leg.



**Tip** If your hamstrings are tight or if you have back problems, bend your knee a bit or prop your knee up by putting a cushion under your thigh.

**Safety Tip** Be sure your foot and knee are facing upward, not rolled to the side. If your foot rolls to the side, your knee will roll sideways, too, which will put too much stress on your knee when you're in the posture.

Now that you've given close attention to your starting position, you're ready to begin!

(See the next page...)



Have your foot pointing roughly upward and relaxed.

Avoid rolling the foot like this.

**Now you're ready for the Leg Stretch!**

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

**Key** Stretch as high as you can, reach 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 toward your toes, keeping the stretch in your back & 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 leg as you can, but not to the point of pain.

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

? 2002 Corinne Friesen [www.audioyoga.com](http://www.audioyoga.com)



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

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.

**You Will Feel It In**

Your lower back, on one side; your hamstring & inner thigh.

**Release**

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

**Repetitions** 3 – 6

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

**Then switch sides & Repeat**

Notice, in the last repetition shown here, Corinne is gaining an additional stretch, her extreme position, by lowering her elbows to the floor. However, her elbows are still loose and open while she grips the back of her feet.



**Safety Tip** When switching to stretch the other leg, be sure to take the time to place yourself in proper starting position. This will give you a better stretch, focus you and prevent injuries.

**Common Errors**



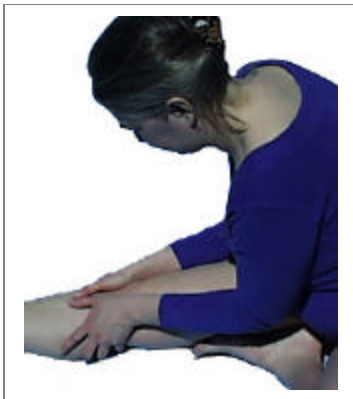
**Allowing the feet to roll to the side**



**Hunching shoulders and upper back.**

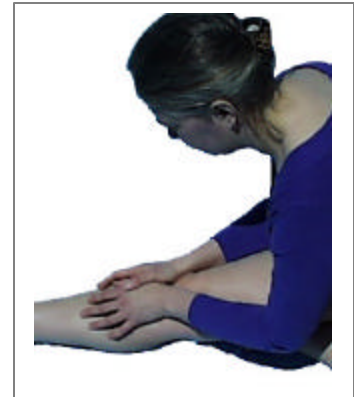
Keep your neck lined up & straight with your back.

**Not opening the elbows.**



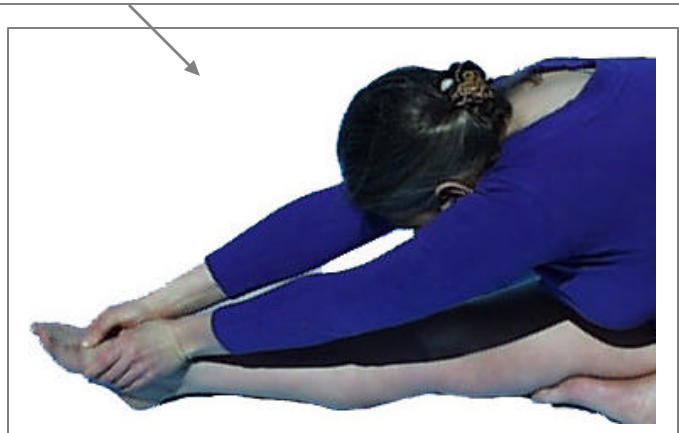
**Not gripping with the hands.**

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



**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 & open.

**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.



# Leg Stretch

# Level 2 / Posture 23

## Breathing



Breathe in, stretching arms up

Pause  
Turn toward foot while paused.



Breathe out, folding body forward



Continue breathing out, bringing hands to grip the knee / leg

**Hold breathing in & out 6 times**

**Release** Breathe in, sitting up

Continue for each repetition, holding farther & father down the leg each time.



Breathe in



Breathe out



Still breathing out, then holding for 6 breaths.



? 2002 Corinne Friesen [www.audioyoga.com](http://www.audioyoga.com)