

Brian's Mid-Workout Stretching Routine.
Photos by Victor Ching.

Here are some basics: Feel each stretch with equal intensity at each stress point. The stretch should feel comfortable, i.e., you could hold the stretch five minutes without becoming uncomfortable. Here's the intensity scale: soothing, very-comfortable, comfortable, tolerably uncomfortable, uncomfortable, very-uncomfortable. Relax all tense muscles.

Stretch #1-a. Calf/Hamstring/Lower Back/Lats (sides of chest)/Arms.

Move the feet back from the wall so you stretch all the intended muscles evenly. Bend the knees slightly to even out the stretch through most of the muscles on the back of the legs. Hold the stretch for a count of ten without discomfort then bring your hips towards the wall until you are in the next position (see #1-b below).



Stretch #1-b. Calf/Hip-Flexor/Neck.

Keeping your heels on the ground, bend your whole body back until you feel a stretch in the hip area. Look up to stretch your neck. Hold the stretch for a count of ten without discomfort. Slowly bend forward until you resume the previous stretch. Do two or three back-and-forth sets.



Stretch #2. Variation on #1 a and b.

The same slow motion (as above), bending forward and backward, stretching one leg and one hip flexor at a time. Move very slowly, without feeling any pain at the full range of motion. Relax. Change leg positions and repeat the process.



Stretch #3. Quads and Posture. You may not be able to get into this position if your quad muscles aren't loose enough. Your knees should be fairly close together, not stuck out to the side.



You shouldn't have to lean forward or to the side as you hold your foot. But you can start in those positions and work towards perfect posture. Without feeling discomfort anywhere.



Stretch # 4. Achilles. Keeping your back straight and your heels on the ground, lower your butt until you feel a stretch on the back of your lower legs to your heels. As before, stand up and lean back, returning to the Achilles stretch position several times. Move very slowly.



The Main Things to this Point: Your body should be in charge, not your mind. The goal is to increase the range of comfortable motion. You don't have to stretch to the point of discomfort in order to increase the comfortable range. Whenever you feel discomfort, just back off and don't go that far the next time. If you go too hard for too long, your body remembers and it will tighten the relevant muscles so you can't go that far next time. That's why it's important to always relax the whole body, especially the muscles you want to stretch.

Stretch #5. Achilles and Back.

Keeping your heels on the ground, continue down until your butt is sitting on your Achilles/heels. This is another stretch you may not be able to do without adjusting your position so you can do it without pain. Go down only as far as your body will allow and then rise up to the full standing position and lean back as before. This stretch stresses the knees. Don't overdo it.



Stretch #6. Bottoms of Your Feet.

Rock forward onto the balls of your feet to stretch the bottoms of your feet. This stretch could protect against plantar fasciitis; it could also cause PF if you overstretch and hurt the fascia, which runs from the toes to the bottom of the heel.



Stretch #7. Grab Your Ankles, Lift Your Butt 10 Times. This is a good way to get back to the standing position. Keep your heels on the ground and lift your butt only as high as you can comfortably. Release the tension by lowering your butt just a little.

