

All FlexM

Laura Brooke: Hello everyone. My name is Laura Brooke. I'm with the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. And today, I'm going to share some yummy strategies with you around stretching.

Stretching helps our bodies to stay flexible, and most importantly, helps our spine to stay flexible. We need a flexible, healthy spine to help our organs, to help us move, to help us do what we do every day.

I'm going to start with one called searching eagles, one of my favorite.

So, I'm going to ask you to take your legs and spread them a little farther than hip distance apart, and then soften those knees. We don't want locked knees. That creates a lot of strain on the knees. So, soften those knees. Soften those knees.

And then just let your arms float up to about shoulder height. And we're just going to begin by letting the arms flow side-to-side, rotating that torso.

This may be all your body wants to do right here.

It can stop and say, "I've had enough twist."

It might say, "Take me a little deeper."

So, you're going to follow with your eyes and your head.

So, listen to your body. Can you feel that spine saying, "Thank you!"

Feel that nice spinal stretch, spinal twist. You're also getting a benefit of massaging the internal organs. Listen to your body.

Now we're going to climb the ladder. I love this stretch because what we're doing is letting our — the space between our ribs open up. So, you're letting your ribs breathe, is what I like to say.

So, it's just like — imagine yourself climbing the ladder, climbing a stairway, reaching up.

Now, you don't have to take it all the way up like this. This is a big shoulder stretch. So, your ladder climbing might look like this. You're going to listen to your body. So, you're getting a really good shoulder stretch. This is great for the back. Actually, the neck gets involved.

You can let your eyes look up.

Smaller.

Smaller.

Climbing the ladder.

This stretch is all about the feet. So, I call this one squishing oranges. So, what you're doing is you're just raising one heel at a time. And just sensing that stretch in the ankle, across the front of the leg. Squishing oranges, or whatever you want to be squishing.

Squish, squish, squish.

If you'd like, and want a little more balance you can come around and take your chair and do the very same thing. But you've got a little more support squishing oranges.

You can begin to feel where you're getting the stretch. Top of the legs, and the quads, the ankles, the calves. It's a yummy one.

Squish, squish — exaggerate — squish, squish.

Our feet are hands that walk the earth. They do a lot. You've got to remember to stretch them, too.

Squishing oranges.

This stretch is called cat-cow curl, and some of you may be familiar with it from yoga experience, or reading about it, or doing it yourself. We're going to do the standing version.

So, what we're going to do is begin by having our legs be about hip distance apart, soft knees, letting our hands just slide down the legs. Stop when your hands get to the top of your knees. You don't want to be hands on the knees, but right above.

We're going to let our belly button be the guide, OK? It's going to be our guide here.

And imagine that you have a string attached to it. So, as we inhale we're going to imagine that string is pulling the belly button up toward the spine as you inhale. See that angry cat?

As you exhale, the belly button is being pulled down toward the earth by that string. Your gaze can come out forward but not up, so keep it on the earth looking forward.

Here we go, we're tucking under again. Chin can come toward the chest.

We inhale, belly button being pulled toward the spine.

We exhale. Belly button pulled toward the spine by that string.

Inhale.

Angry cat, we threw water on it.

Exhale, belly button down toward the earth.

We're the cow.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Belly button is the guide.

Cat-cow curls.

We're going to play with some imaginary beach balls now. This is really fun, so take yourself to the beach, and just imagine you are juggling beach balls.

They're starting slow, one at a time is coming.

Uh-oh.

More.

So, you can play with faster, slower. You're getting to shoulder stretch.

If you really hold your hands in a flat — kind of like you're holding on to a plate — you're really going to get a nice wrist stretch.

Juggling beach balls.

You can move around.

Oops, they're down here. They're not always up above you, right?

They are back here, so they're not always in one place, are they?

Now they're really getting crazy so we've got to start getting them out of the way.

Pummel, pummel, pummel.

So, really feel that stretch across the top your hand, your forearm.

Pummel, pummel, pummel.

Keep them up, keep them up.

Hold them up.

Now you can feel that stretch all the way across your top of your hand, your forearm.

Pummeling, pummeling, juggling. Keeping the shoulders down as you move. Following with your eyes.

Beach balls.

We're going to do a stretch that's called turning doorknobs. I love this stretch.

Let's just start by bringing your arms — float those arms up to your shoulders. Shoulders stay down.

Not here.

Here.

And you're just going to imagine that you are — maybe first, you're opening some doors. So, you're turning doorknobs.

So, soften your arms.

They don't have to be extended wide. And imagine your hands are around a doorknob. You decide, a little doorknob, a big doorknob.

Turning doorknobs.

What I want you to sense is that rotation in the shoulder area.

So, you're turning doorknobs.

You imagine the door opening or closing.

Small doorknobs, bigger doorknobs.

So, turning doorknobs.

Imagine your door, your doorknobs. You want to be opening or closing your door. You choose. Our shoulders take a lot of stress and strain as the day goes on, as our stress builds. Shoulders hold a lot, as do hips.

Turning doorknobs.

You might be saying, "I'm opening a door."

You might be saying, "I'm closing this door right now."

"I don't want to talk to you right now."

So, turning doorknobs, again imagining yourself actually doing this.

Up, and again, listen to your body. Listen to your shoulders.

You might want to turn doorknobs just right here. That's fine. You may want to go higher. High plane.

You may want to go a little lower.

Turning doorknobs.

You can actually bring the doorknobs behind you.

It's a big shoulder movement, so listen to your body.

The two bones in your forearm actually rotate over and under each other. It's amazing — little fact.

So, this is one of those movements where you can get a lot of stretch all the way through the arm.

Turning doorknobs.