

The Twig Unbent

exercises for a supple spine



Resting Spinal Stretch



The Resting Spinal Stretch loosens tight and stiff areas in the spine, relaxes the pelvis and tailbone, and relieves that bloated feeling that can come from sluggish fluid flow.

Directions:

You'll need a support for your head such as a book 6 to 8 inches high. Pad it with a folded towel.

Next, lie down on the floor on your back. Rest your head on the book so the book supports it in the middle of a line joining the tops of your ears.

Then, bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor about one shoulder-width apart. Touch your knees together and turn your feet outward about 30-45 degrees. Finally, place your hands, palms down, on your belly with your thumbs near your belly button. Rest in this position for 15 to 30 minutes.

If you feel generally uncomfortable, do this exercise for only 5 to 10 minutes at a time. If your head is uncomfortable, get a thinner or thicker book, whichever feels better. If you feel a pulling or tightness somewhere, it means your body is stretching itself. This discomfort will stop after you've done the exercise several times.

You might even enjoy listen to some quiet pleasant music during the exercise. If you do the exercise daily, you will notice how much better you feel and how much easier you move in about 1 month.

Piston Breathing



Deep and easy breathing is crucial to good metabolism.

Direction:

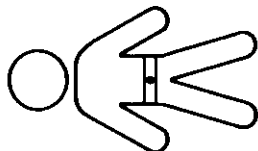
Stand comfortably with your feet shoulder width apart.

Breathe in and out deeply through your nose taking in and expelling as much air as possible. Imagine the diaphragm like a piston traveling up and down to help move the air in and out.

Begin with no more than three repetitions at a fast pace and build slowly up from there.

Be sure to expand your chest fully

Belly Button Binder



Sometimes, babies don't breathe as easily or freely as they should. We use the Belly Button Binder to stimulate a primitive reflex. Pressure on the belly button stimulates the respiratory diaphragm to move more fully and freely. Baby's deeper breathing releases kinks remaining from the birth process and improves general energy.

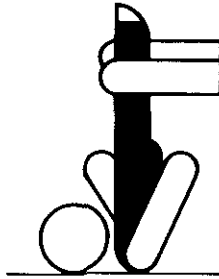
Directions:

To do this exercise, you'll need to make the belly binder. Begin by measuring around the baby at the belly button. Add 3 to 4 inches to this measurement. Then, using the measurement, make a 1 to 2 inch wide band. So you can adjust the band snugly around the baby's belly, sew Velcro on the ends.

If your baby is more than 3 months old, complete this project by sewing a button at about the middle of the band. Choose a button with a rounded (convex) top. Apply the band snugly around baby's middle with the button pushing gently into baby's belly button. For babies less than 3 months old, you do not need the button. Just apply the band snugly around baby at the belly button level.

The band should be snug enough to stay on while baby moves about, yet gentle enough to be comfortable. Let the baby wear the belly binder at night. Take it off during the day.

Baby Shoulder Stand



The Baby Shoulder Stand stretches baby's spine, especially the neck. Stretching both spine and neck helps baby uncurl from the fetal position. Remember, because your baby lived for 9 months curled up in the womb, it will take some time to straighten out the spine. Both you and baby should have a good time while you help loosen your baby's back.

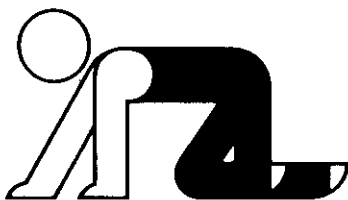
Directions:

To begin, place baby on his or her back. Next, gently hold baby's legs up into the air. Raise the body until you gently bend baby's head on his or her neck. **Important : Make sure the shoulders carry the body weight.**

Then, lightly hold this position as baby wiggles playfully about.

If your baby seems uncomfortable, lower his or her body to the flat position and do the exercise another time. You may do the Baby Shoulder Stand several times daily, gradually building up to 10 minutes a session.

Cross Crawl



Sometimes we strain our backs from poor patterns of movements. By developing better patterns muscular coordination and rhythm, the Cross Crawl helps release these back strains. It can also relieve lower back pains, especially those during pregnancy.

Directions:

For this exercise, protect your knees with knee pads, like the kind you use when gardening.

Begin on all fours on a well-carpeted floor. Then, as described below, start crawling around the floor. First, move the right hand and left knee forward. As you move the right hand forward, turn your head to the right.

Then, move the left hand and right knee forward. As you move the left hand forward, turn your head to the left. Breathe deeply as you crawl.

Crawl for about 5 minutes every day. Your body will automatically develop an easier, more coordinated rhythm. When you move more smoothly, you will be less apt to strain your back.

Diaphragm Release



Poor breathing makes you feel tired. This exercise will show you how the diaphragm gets locked up and what you can do about it.

Mental, emotional and physical shock shut down the diaphragm's full and free movement. Most of the time, you and your diaphragm recover. Sometimes, though, you really get the wind knocked out of you and don't quite get it back. When that happens, you breathe and live at half speed.

This Diaphragm Release exercise gradually reduces the tension in and around the diaphragm. Reduced tension helps the diaphragm to stroke more deeply and freely so you can breathe deeper and easier. That way, you get more oxygen - that precious fuel for the metabolic furnaces - into the blood.

Directions:

To begin, lie on your stomach on the floor. Next, place a 1.5 inch thick rubber ball in your belly button. Finally, just lie comfortably in the position for about 20 minutes. The diaphragm attaches to the spine at belly button level. The pressure slowly stretches and softens those diaphragm attachments.

If you get uncomfortable before a minute is up, use a smaller ball. If you get uncomfortable before 20 minutes is up, stop, remove the ball and lie quietly on the floor for a few minutes.

Folded Leaf



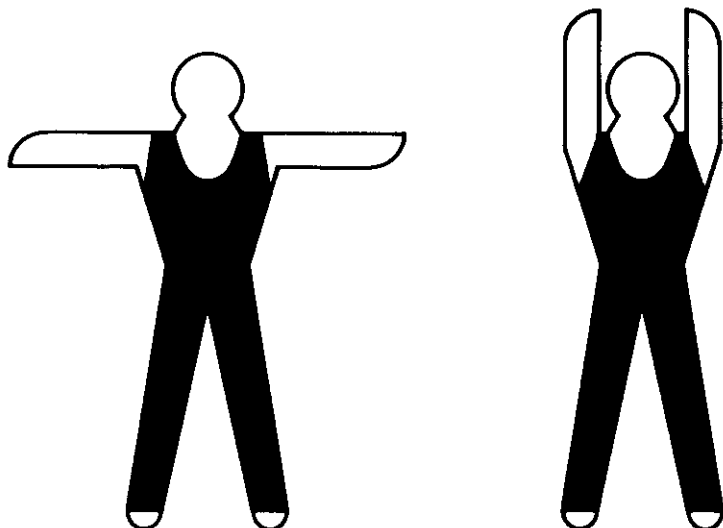
The Folded Leaf loosens and relaxes a tightened spine and diaphragm for easier breathing. The Folded Leaf exercise also stretches the ligaments of the pelvis and hips.

Directions:

To begin, kneel on the floor. Then, bend forward, placing your forearms, with your palms down, on the floor next to your head. Next, resting your forehead gently on the floor, move your elbows as close as you comfortably can to your knees. Finally, keep your buttocks on or as close to the back of your calves as you can. Initially, that may not be too close. With time, as your spine loosens, you'll get closer.

Lie in this position for about 20 minutes. If you are uncomfortable, quit. If you can go the full 20 minutes easily, curl up a little tighter.

Hanging Arms



Sometimes, a tight upper spine and chest causes congestion in the head and neck. The Hanging Arm exercise relaxes the upper spine and frees circulation from the chest to the head and neck.

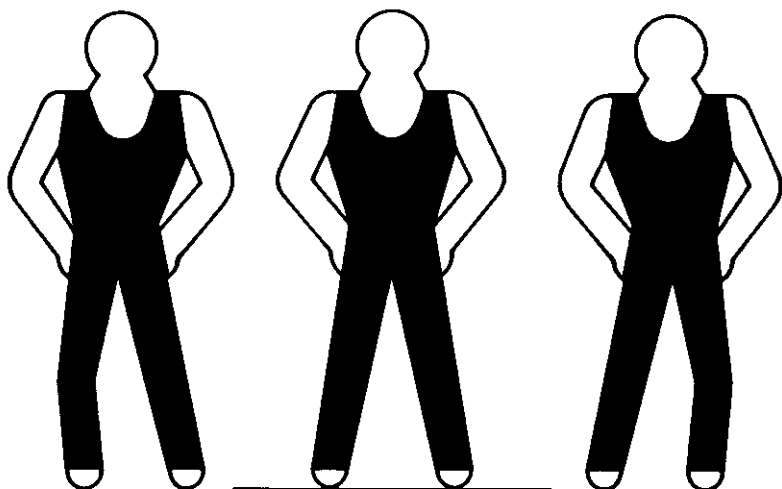
Directions:

Begin the exercise by standing up straight with your feet a shoulder-width apart. Raise your arms out to the side so they form a right angle with your torso. Throughout the arm hanging part of the exercise, keep your upper body with your head centered (i.e., in the midline of your body) and your eyes fixed on a spot in front of you.

MEN, turn your left palm up toward the ceiling and your right palm down toward the floor. **WOMEN**, turn your left palm down toward the floor and your right palm up toward the ceiling.

Let your arms hang in this position until you become uncomfortable. Then, raise your hands until your elbows touch your ears and the back of one hand touches the palm of the other hand. Finally, lower your hands to your sides. Build up to 8 minutes once a day.

Hip Release



The Hip Release exercise helps relieve pain in the lower back and hip joints. It especially helps the kind of hip and back pain that comes on when you get out of a chair you've been sitting in for a while. The Hip Release exercise also eases pelvic and hip joint strains and helps teach joint ligaments and tendons how to work properly again.

Directions:

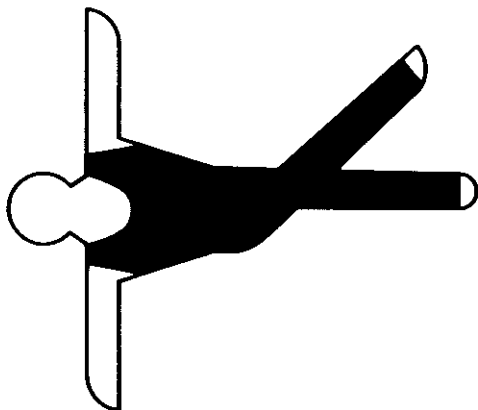
To begin, stand straight with your feet about 6 inches apart. Then, place your hands on the upper outside of the thighs. Find the bony part near the hips that is part of the thigh bone.

With your left hand, gently push that thigh bone to the right, against the hip. While holding that left hip pressure steady, suddenly drop the right knee by bending the right knee quickly and letting the right hip shift downward. Then, straighten the right knee.

Repeat the process for the other side. Apply pressure to the right hip joint, then suddenly drop the left knee.

After a little practice, you can do 4 or 5 repetitions very quickly. When you're done, walk around a little bit. If you are still a little stiff, you can do the exercise several more times.

Hip Twist



The Hip Twist helps loosen a stiff lower back and hips for easier walking. The more flexible your spine, the easier you move and the less back pain you will have.

Directions:

To begin, lie on the floor. Then, stretch your arms out to the side, forming a right angle (90 degrees) with your body. MEN, face the left palm up toward the ceiling and the right palm down toward the floor. WOMEN, face the left palm down and the right palm up.

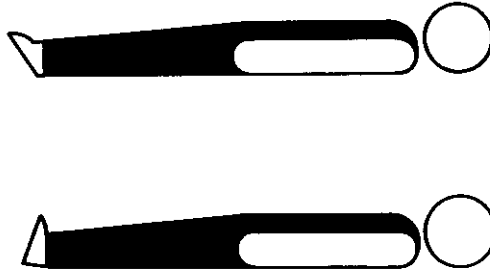
Next, bring the feet together with your knees straight. (Throughout the exercise, you must keep the knees straight and both shoulders flat on the floor.)

Then, lift your left leg off the floor. Turn your hips to the right and rest your left foot on the floor on the right side of your body. If your foot doesn't touch the floor, support your leg with pillows or a small stool.

While resting in this position, breathe deeply. Stay in the position for 5 minutes. If you feel uncomfortable before the 5 minutes are up, quit. Over time, your endurance will increase to 5 minutes.

Finally, bring the left leg back to its original position. Do the same exercise using the right leg.

Leg Stretch



The Leg Stretch helps ease leg aches and pains and keeps your legs strong and flexible. When your legs are stronger and more flexible, they carry your body weight around more easily. Because leg muscles attach into the pelvis and spine, strains in the legs affect the rest of the body. As the Leg Stretch releases these strains, it helps the rest of the body, too.

Directions:

Lie down flat on your back on a firm, comfortable surface with your legs straight. First, point your toes away from you. Keep them pointing away for about 6 seconds. Then, relax your feet, letting them rest in whatever position they relax most comfortably.

Next, point your toes up toward your head. Keep your toes pointing toward your head for 6 seconds. Finally, relax your feet to a neutral position.

Repeat this exercise 10 times, one session a day.

Lower Back Stretch



The Lower Back Stretch helps loosen a tight and stiff lower spine.

Directions:

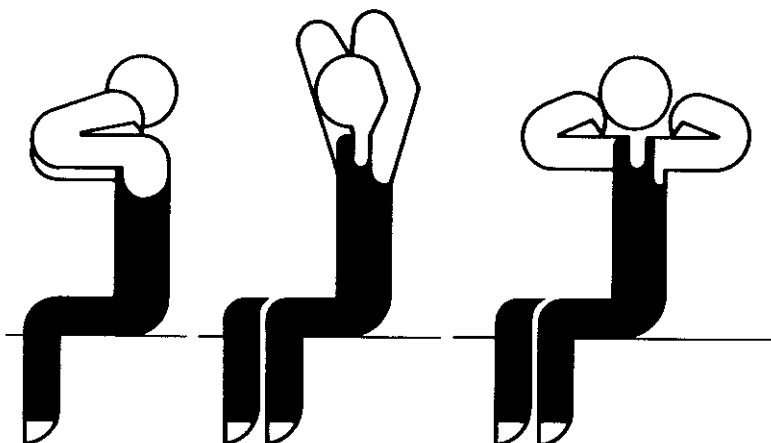
To do this exercise, you'll need a soccer or basketball.

Begin by lying flat on your back on the floor. Bend your knees, bringing your heels as close to your buttocks as you can. Raise your lower back, sliding the ball underneath. Move the ball until it rests on the spine between your tailbone and the lower border of your rib cage.

Lie in this position for up to 20 minutes daily. When your lower back gets uncomfortable, slowly raise your back, remove the ball, and lower yourself to the floor. Even if you are still comfortable after lying on the ball for 20 minutes, do not continue this exercise past the 20 minute limit.

When you've finished lying on the ball, you'll need to help the stretched spinal ligaments relax and readjust. So, next lie flat on your back for several minutes. When you feel rested and refreshed, roll over onto your side and slowly get up.

Shoulder Rolls



Consider the Shoulder Rolls exercise when the upper spine and chest are too tight or uncomfortable. Shoulder Rolls improve head and neck circulation, loosen the upper spine and chest, and makes breathing easier.

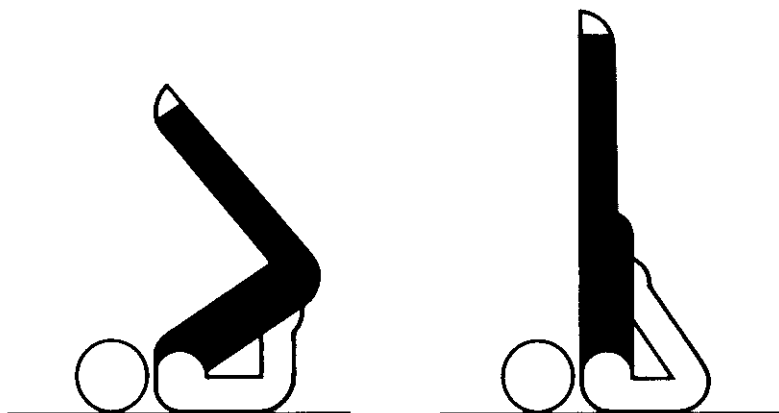
Directions:

To begin, sit upright in a chair. Straighten your back and place both feet squarely on the floor. Then, bending your elbows in front of you, place your fingertips on the tops of your shoulders.

Next, breathe slowly and fully. As you breathe in, lower your head and raise your elbows toward the ceiling. As you breathe out, roll your elbows out to the side, ending at your beginning position. Be sure that as you roll your elbows out to the side, you lift your head back to its original position.

Practice this exercise 5 times per session, 2 to 3 times a day.

Shoulder Stand



Moving around with a stiff spine or upper back is no fun. The Shoulder Stand helps in two ways: It gently stretches the entire spine, including ligaments, tendons, muscles and all; and it improves circulation to the head and neck. When you get more blood to your head, you can think more clearly.

Directions:

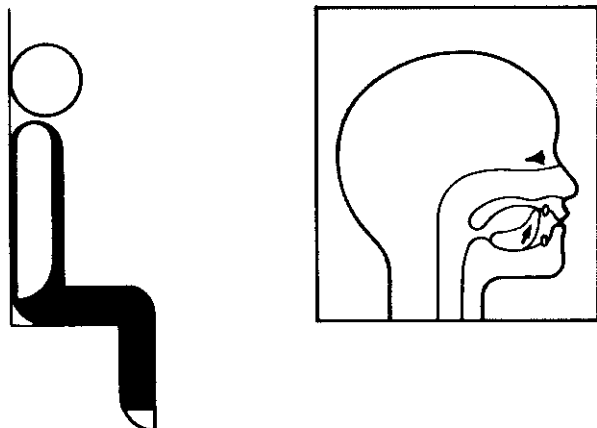
To begin, lie flat on your back on the floor, arms at your side. Gently raise your legs and hips. When your body is high enough, support your hips with your palms. Then, push yourself up so your legs and back are straight up in the air. Align your legs and torso to about a 90 degree angle at your head and neck.

Finally, rest in this position for up to 5 minutes. If you become uncomfortable before that time, quit.

When the time is up, slowly lower yourself to the floor by bending your legs and supporting your hips on your palms. Lower your hips to the floor and lie comfortably on your back for several minutes.

Build up to 5 minutes a session, several sessions daily.

Sit and Breathing Exercise



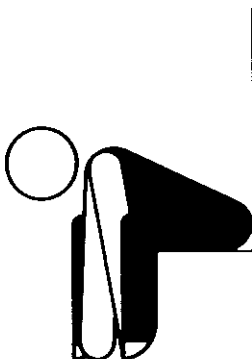
This simple breathing exercise brings more oxygen into the lungs. It will refresh and relax you, and increase your vitality.

Directions:

Begin by sitting comfortably in a chair with your spine straight. Place your tongue just above the ridge behind the upper front teeth. Then, close your mouth. Remember, to keep the tongue against the ridge on the roof of the mouth behind your two upper teeth throughout the exercise.

Breathe deeply through your nose, fully expanding your lungs. Next, hold the breath as you slowly count to 7. Finally, breathe out comfortably through your nose.

Spinal Stretch



The Spinal Stretch stretches the entire back, making it more flexible and resilient and easier for you to move around. That way, you'll have less energy tied up in getting from place to place and more energy for living.

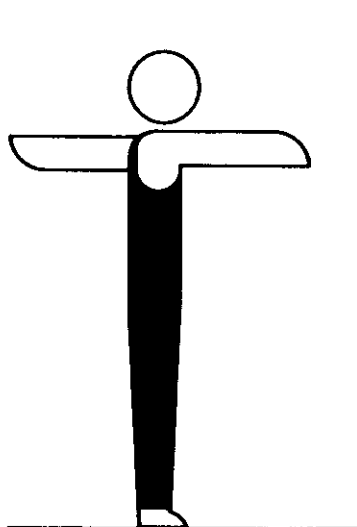
Directions:

To begin this exercise, sit in a chair with your back straight. Sit with your thighs parallel with the floor, your feet about a shoulder-width apart and your knees bent 90 degrees.

Then, bend over your thighs, placing your elbows inside your knees. Turn your palms away from each other, fingers under the arch of each foot. (That is, place your right fingers under the arch of your right foot and your left fingers under the arch of your left foot.) Place your thumbs over the top of the foot. Gently, let your head drop forward.

Finally, breathe slowly and fully, allowing your back to stretch. Relax fully in the Spinal Stretch position for up to 5 minutes daily.

Spiral Stretch



This exercise stretches your body in several directions. The stretching helps the diaphragm and rib cage move easier so you can breathe easier. Better breathing moves sluggish body fluids. All this loosening up will make you feel perkier.

Directions:

To begin, stand in front of a mirror. Separate your feet about shoulder-width. During the exercise, remember to keep your feet in this original position and your head facing forward. When you twist your body during the exercise (see below), keep your head steady by looking at one spot in the mirror.

Next, raise your arms out to the side until they are at a right angle to your body and parallel to the floor. Turn your left palm upward and your right palm downward. Next, twist your trunk all the way to the left as comfortably as it will go, then twist it all the way to the right.

At first, practice this exercise for 1 or 2 minutes daily. Gradually, build up to 5 minutes a day. First work on form, then develop speed.

Standing Spinal Stretch



The Standing Spinal Stretch stretches both back and legs.

Directions:

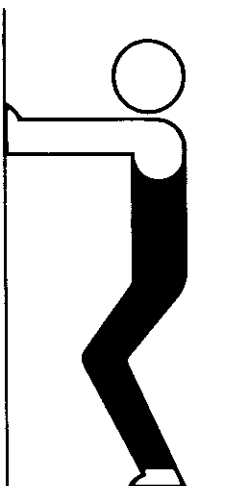
To begin, stand upright with your feet shoulder-width apart. Next, touch the inside of your knees together. Finally, bend forward to touch your fingertips to the floor in front of your feet. If you can't reach the floor, just stretch as far as you can easily.

Remain in this position as long as you can comfortably.

Gradually, build up to 3 minutes several times a day.

Those whose occupations keep them in strained positions for a long time (such as dentists, draftsmen, assembly line workers) use this exercise to unkink their strained backs. What a difference the Standing Spinal Stretch will make after a long day at work!

Standing Stretch



The Standing Stretch loosens the entire spine as you breathe deeply while you keep your body in one position against a wall. With each deep breath, your diaphragm pulls and stretches your spinal ligaments.

Directions:

To begin, stand facing a wall with your feet shoulder-width apart. Step back about 2 to 3 feet. Next, raise your arms shoulder-height in front of you and place your palms on the wall.

Then, keeping your feet flat on the floor, bend your knees as far as you can comfortably. Finally, with your knees bent, breathe fully for about 1 minute.

Repeat this exercise 5 times in a row, once a day.

Listing of Exercises

Ankle Stretch

Baby Shoulder Stand

Belly Button Binder

Cross Crawl

Diaphragm Release

Folded Leaf

Hanging Arms

Hip Release

Hip Twist

Leg Stretch

Lower Back Stretch

Resting Spinal Stretch

Shoulder Rolls

Shoulder Stand

Sit and Breathing Exercise

Spinal Stretch

Spiral Stretch

Standing Spinal Stretch

Standing Stretch

Upper Thoracic Stretch

Ankle Stretch



The Ankle Stretch alternately stretches one leg then the other. Since the legs attach to the hips and the hips to the spine, this exercise stretches the hips and spine as well.

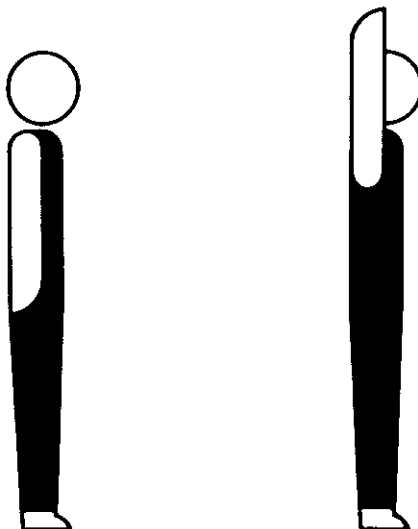
Directions:

Lying down on your back on the floor, bring your feet together. Extend your arms out to the side.

Begin the exercise by first pointing the toes of one foot toward your head. You will be doing it correctly if you feel the stretching in the Achilles tendon (in the back of the calf). At the same time, point the toes of your other foot away from your head. When you feel a tension on the top of the foot, you will be stretching that foot correctly.

As you lie in that position, one set of toes pointing toward your head and the other set away from you, breathe deeply. Hold this position for 30 seconds or however long is comfortable. Finally, switch foot positions, holding the new position for 30 seconds.

Upper Thoracic Stretch



The Upper Thoracic Stretch helps stretch out the upper back. It helps relieve the stiffness, soreness and downright back tiredness after years of the "office desk slump."

Directions:

To begin, stand with your back against a wall. Press your heels, buttocks, shoulders and palms against the wall. Throughout the exercise, keep your back pressed tightly against the wall.

Next, stretch your arms downward, as if you were trying to lengthen them. Then, gently raise your arms out to the side until they are above your head. When the backs of your palms touch above your head, stop.

Next, with your palms against the wall and your arms stretched, slowly lower your arms to the starting position. Finally, when your arms are again by your sides at the starting position, relax your arms and back.

If you feel you need a little more stretching, do the exercise again.

To really benefit from the thoracic stretch, keep your back tightly against the wall and feel that stretch extend into your fingertips and arms.

Book Review

by Mel Friedman, D.O.

The Twig Unbent

edited by Stephen M. Davidson, D.O.

While anyone close to Osteopathy would be familiar with Dr. Robert Fulford, few of us have regular contact with him. As a result, any information from him is greatly appreciated. This information often has the significance of being a "pearl" or precious commodity to further us on our paths of helping our patients to find freedom from suffering.

The book, *The Twig Unbent*, is a series of twenty exercises from Dr. Fulford that can be done in association with osteopathic care. While most exercises are for adults, some are specifically for children. All emphasize the breath as an important source of body energy and vitality. This is precisely what makes the exercises such good adjuncts for patients to do during or following osteopathic manipulative treatment.

The simply written format is concise, clear and accompanied by nice illustrations. It is loose bound which allows easy separation in order to remove exercises unnecessary for a particular case or to facilitate copying of the material.

I have found the book useful for myself and for my practice. I would recommend it to anyone using manipulative modalities.

The Cranial Letter, Fall, 1990, Volume 43, Number 4