

A content cat ...



... stretches often.

Cats stretching

It's the secret to their health

There is no denying it – cats are masters of the stretch! Whether it's a flex before breakfast or a yawn after dinner, cats have long understood the many benefits that come with stretching.

Like people, cats stretch to keep themselves supple and feeling good. This is because a decent stretching programme can help reduce the risk of injury by improving circulation to an area (like bringing in nutrients and oxygen and removing waste products), decreasing muscle tightness, improving joint range of motion and enhancing the overall mechanical efficiency and functional performance of the musculoskeletal system.

Being hunters, it is imperative that our feline friends are ready for sudden bursts of motion at any moment. They also need to ensure that their

muscles are warm and ready for action after long bouts of prey-stalking.

And s-t-r-e-t-c-h

Although cats regularly stretch themselves out, these non-specific, patient-controlled stretches are known as active stretches, and are not necessarily as effective as targeted, assisted (or passive) stretching. Older cats may also struggle to indulge in stretches which would be advantageous to them. It is, therefore, just as important for cats to be on a regular stretching programme as it is for dogs and people!

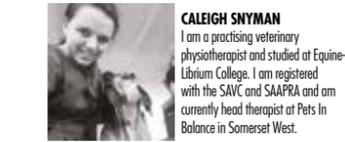
Stretches, when executed properly, are relaxing and enjoyable, and performing them daily with your cat will also help to strengthen your bond – a form of kitty-yoga if you will. Here are some guidelines to help you get started.

Types of stretches

There are a few general stretches that you can do daily with your whiskered companion to ensure that she is always feeling fantastic!

1. THE DOWN-WITH-DOG (SPINAL AND HAMSTRINGS STRETCH)

Most cats love being scratched at the base of their tail and will, in response, stand on their tiptoes with their hind feet and move into a bowing position in front. This stretches out the spine and also encourages a gentle hamstring stretch.



CALEIGH SNYMAN
I am a practising veterinary physiotherapist and studied at Equine-Librium College. I am registered with the SAVC and SAAPPA and am currently head therapist at Pets In Balance in Somerset West.



2. THE PREPARE-TO-PUMMEL (HINDLIMB PROTRACTION STRETCH)

Wait till your cat is lying on her side. Gently grasp her hindlimb at the hock (the ankle joint) with one hand, while placing your other hand in front of her stifle (knee), and extend her limb forwards until you feel the beginning of resistance.

3. THE MEOWN-WALK (HINDLIMB RETRACTION STRETCH)

Wait till your cat is lying on her side. Gently grasp her hindlimb at the hock (the ankle joint) and extend her limb backwards until you feel the beginning of resistance.



4. THE KITTY SOFT-PAWS (FORELIMB PROTRACTION STRETCH)

Wait till your cat is sitting or lying on her side. Cup the back of her elbow in your hand and gently extend the limb forward until you feel the start of resistance.

5. THE COOL CAT (FORELIMB RETRACTION STRETCH)

Wait till your cat is sitting or lying on her side. Place your hand in front of her elbow and shoulder and gently stretch the limb backwards until you feel the start of resistance.



FAST FACTS

- All animals have receptors in their muscles, which are activated when a stretch is performed too quickly. This will stimulate the muscle to contract and the cat will fight against the movement. This is why it is extremely important to do each stretch slowly and carefully.
- Stretching cold muscles can result in injury – make sure your cat is warmed up before your sessions together.
- If your cat has a musculoskeletal injury, stretching will not always be indicated. For a specific stretching programme that is tailored to your individual cat's needs, it is important to contact a registered animal physiotherapist.
- Not all cats will tolerate being stretched in the manners described here, so it will be up to you to modify the way you perform the stretch to your individual pet's needs. This may mean picking your cat up to keep her from wriggling away or using treats or toys to encourage the stretch that you want.

For how long should I hold the stretch?

Our goal with any stretch is usually to hold it for between 15 and 20 seconds, but it can occasionally take a while to work your way up to this number. Generally, it is advised to stretch once or twice daily and perform each stretch three times in a session.

Remember, cats may have nine lives, but that doesn't mean that they are immune to injuries and arthritis – it just means that they hide their pain well. A stretching programme is both a fantastic way of helping to prevent injury, as well as of alleviating pain that is already present and that you may not even be aware of! 🐾