

Recumbent chest-and-spine stretch

The recumbent chest-and-spine stretch can help the initial phase of any proper exercise progression, called the *releasing phase*. The exercise specifically releases the tightness in your chest, in the front of your shoulders, and in your lower back.

1. Lie on a firm, flat surface with your hips and knees bent at a 90 degree angle. Rest your lower legs on a chair, couch, or bed, as shown on Figure 1.



Figure 1

Depending on the degree of tightness in your chest, spine, and shoulders, you may need to begin this exercise on a softer surface (an exercise mat, blankets on the floor, or your bed), and place a small pillow or rolled-up towel under your head and neck to support them in a comfortable, neutral position. You may also need to place a small towel roll under the small of your back to support its arch.

2. As shown in Figure 2, bend your elbows to approximately 90 degrees and position your arms 60 to 80 degrees away from the sides of your body so that you begin to feel a comfortable stretch in the front of your chest and shoulders.

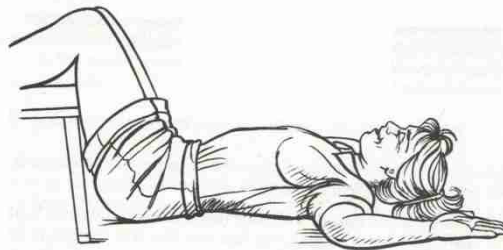


Figure 2

This arm position looks a lot like a waiter's arms do when he carries a tray in each hand.

If you feel any pinching in your shoulders, try elevating your arms and resting them on a stack of towels or a small pillow so that your elbows are higher above the floor than your shoulders.

3. Relax into this comfortable stretch position for at least three to five minutes or until you experience a *complete* release of the tightness in your chest, front of your shoulders, and lower back.

You're trying to get your back, spine, and shoulders completely flat on the floor.

Repeat this exercise daily for five to ten days until you can perform the exercise easily, feeling no lingering tightness in your body.

You may want to increase the degree of stretch in your body by removing any support of padding from under your body and/or arms – or even by adding a small towel roll under the middle portion of your spine (at shoulder-blade level) in a position perpendicular to your spine (see Figure 3). Remember always to keep the degree of stretch comfortable and to support your head, neck, spine, and arms so that you don't put excessive stress on those structures while you perform this exercise.

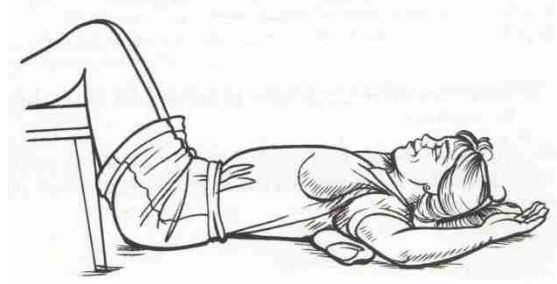


Figure 3