

The

UNSTOPPABLE

Mom

Your Guilt-Free Guide to Getting Strong,
Relieving Chronic Pain and Outrunning Your Kids

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While standing directly in front of that pile of wet towels, engage your transverse muscle, bend your hips and knees, letting your booty come out behind you, and lower yourself down as far as you can toward the floor. The goal is to keep your low back flat. Remember, you're going to untuck your pelvis to get your booty back behind you because for this movement, you want a curve in your low back. Let more of your weight shift into the balls of your feet to help your balance and then, when you've gotten into this semi-squat position as far as you can, you can round your mid back to allow yourself to pick that laundry up off the floor. From here, bring the laundry to your chest in as close as you can. Then use your glute and leg muscles to push yourself upright as you retuck your pelvis with an engaged transverse and straighten your hips and knees. Start practicing this right now when you bend to pick up everyday objects, and when you feel more stable and confident in the movement, start using this technique to pick up your little ones.



Picture of functional lifting and core engagement when picking up a toddler

Picking up your little ones may be one of the biggest challenges you have, and it only gets harder as they get bigger but still want to be held. Make it a game for them to help you, or encourage them to be Mommy's helper. For little kids, get down into that semi-squat position and have them come in for a hug so you can then use your lower body to lift both of you upright. For bigger kids, tell them they can help Mommy by climbing up onto the couch or a chair so you can lift them from a mostly standing position. Lifting babies out of the crib can become a painful task for even the strongest women out there because of the high crib railing— great for keeping baby safe but horrible for your ergonomics. Get an aerobic or exercise step to keep right under your child's crib. When you go to put her down or lift her out of the crib, pull the stool forward with your foot and step up onto it to allow you to go into a mini-squat, then bend over the crib rail with your back and core more protected. As baby gets older, make it a fun game for them to stand up for a hug when you're lifting them out of the crib.

◆ *Oblique Stretch* ◆

Remember those oblique muscles that wrap around your sides from the outer half of your low back to the outer half of your abdomen? These muscles naturally tighten during pregnancy as the belly grows out and the obliques shorten. So if you've ever been pregnant or if you have a hard time getting your transverse muscle to fully engage, do this self-release stretch now.

Lying on your back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor and hip width apart, tuck your ribs down and in to neutral. If you can't get your ribs tucked or if the back of your rib cage isn't in contact with the ground, put a pillow under your head and shoulders to help bring those ribs down.

Place your right hand on the lower rib cage on your right side, anchoring your ribs to the ground. Then slowly let your knees fall to the side in the opposite direction until you feel a stretch in the side of your abdomen.

For added release, use your free hand and gently pull along your oblique muscle from as far as you can reach around your side, toward your belly button to get a deeper stretch. Hold this for 30 seconds to 1 minute, until you feel those abdominals and your hips relax. Repeat this on the opposite side.

This exercise shouldn't need to be one you do forever. Over time, you should feel less and less of a stretch in your obliques, and then this stretch is no longer needed. If you have diastasis recti that you are trying to heal, continue to do this stretch until your separation is healed.



Picture of the oblique stretch. Original Credit to Lynn Schulte

◆ *Lower Body Stretches* ◆

Hip Flexor Stretch

The hip flexor is a muscle group that we abuse daily, and it can be difficult to stretch properly. I like to compare it to the '90s phone call arm. Remember when you used to talk on the phone for hours as a teenager and when you got off, you'd have to pry your arm straight because your bicep was so tight and sore? That's essentially what we do to our hip flexors as we sit all day long with that hip flexor shortening, just like our bicep did on the phone.



Picture of the starting position of the hip flexor stretch



Picture of the stretch position of the hip flexor stretch

This stretch is awesome for anyone who sits for extended periods throughout the day. I like this variation because it protects your low back, keeps your core in neutral, and can target the upper hip flexors that run all the way up to the front of the lumbar spine. Start by getting into the same semi-kneeling position we talked about in chapter 5 when getting up off the floor: your back knee on the ground stacked directly below your hip and your front knee bent at ninety degrees with your foot flat on the floor and your ankle stacked directly below your knee. Positioning is picky on this one, so if you don't feel a good stretch, check that your joints are stacked and your legs are at ninety degrees. From here, go into an exaggerated pelvic tuck, scooping your tailbone up toward your head without moving the rest of your body. You should feel this stretch right at the front of your hip, if your quad—that big muscle at the front of your thigh—is tight, you will feel the stretch here first, as it's a much bigger muscle. Keep doing this stretch, and as your quad loosens up, you will start to feel the stretch at the front of the hip. You can add in a deeper stretch at the upper part of the hip flexor by reaching the arm on the same side straight up toward the ceiling, without twisting or bending to the side.

Remember, we don't want your back to arch or your front knee to come forward during this stretch, which may be what your body wants to do, as it makes the movement less work for you.

Feel free to hold on to a chair or table for balance if needed. Hold this for at least 30 seconds and then repeat on the other side.

◆ *Foam Rolling* ◆

Foam rolling is a great way to release tension in muscles that may be hard to stretch. It also helps release the fascia. You can use a foam roller on almost any body part—the legs, glutes, obliques, mid back, shoulders, or arms. The basic concept of the foam roller is to place the tight muscle on top of the roller and move your body up and down or side to side along the roller to release it. For video instructions on how to release specific muscles using a foam roller, check out the resources page. You can also do some of your stretches right on the foam roller to get a bigger, deeper stretch. For example, doing the figure-four glute stretch while sitting on the foam roller massages the muscle as you stretch it.

Postural Openers

If you are having trouble with your rib tuck, or you just feel very slouched forward when you do it, postural openers are important stretches for you.

First, get your foam roller and place it on the floor. Lie down with the foam roller along your spine between you and the floor, bend your knees, and place your feet flat on the floor. Bring your arms straight up toward the ceiling, and slowly let them fall open with your palms facing up toward the ceiling, making a capital T with your body and arms. Your arms should slowly sink down toward the floor as your muscles relax and your chest opens.

If you don't feel a good stretch here or you want to feel a deeper stretch, shift your arms closer to your head into a Y position. If you feel any numbness or tingling in your hands, that's okay as long as it's not painful. The more you do this stretch, that tingling will dissipate. If you don't have a foam roller, you can do a version of this stretch on the foot corner of your bed—lie down diagonally across the bed with your head at the foot corner, open your arms up, and drop them off the edges of the bed to feel this stretch across the front of your chest.

Another postural-opening move to help open up the chest and front of the neck is to use the roller up and down your back. Place the foam roller on the ground and lie down with it perpendicular to your spine at your upper back. Bring your hands behind your head to support your neck, and keep your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Lift your hips up off the ground, and slowly roll yourself down to the bottom of your rib cage and back up to the top of your shoulders a couple times, letting your body round over either side of the foam roller. You may feel some release or hear some popping, and that is totally normal!



Picture of postural opener stretch on the foam roller

These are all wonderful stretches, but don't feel like you have to do all of them every day. Find the ones that feel best, and make those your priority. Then switch them up, doing a couple different stretches every day until you get into a good routine. Stretching doesn't have to take a big chunk of your time. Five minutes a day can make a huge difference, and once you've started to feel the benefit of routine stretching, it will be easy to keep it in your routine.