

# Purposeful Movement

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR AMAZING BODIES

*I will give thanks to You, because I am awesomely and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.*

*Psalm 139:14*

**HELLO**  
*darling*

*Surprise!*

*Lately, I've been thinking about the purpose behind different exercises & moves that I do & teach, how they work, & how beautifully God designed our bodies. After much prayer, I was inspired to bring forth this 1st of an untold number of newsletters, which may or may not show up on my blog & may or may not be bi-monthly. But for now, submitted for your reading pleasure - **Issue Number 1!** Enjoy!*

*You are loved!*

*Jaye*

## YOUR CALF MUSCLES: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

by Jacinta "Jaye" DeCohen, C.P.T.

*(because initials make you sound official)*

If you've taken fitness classes, danced all night long, or just run around, you will notice that either directly or indirectly, your calves will have been worked. That's because, beloved, the calves are a very important, yet somewhat overlooked muscle group that doesn't get attention until something is wrong or hurting. Regularly working and stretching your calves will do wonders for so many different parts of your body - feet, ankles (I can personally testify to that one!), hips, posture, even headaches! Let's dive in, see how this amazing section of our bodies works, and how we can help them function in a more efficient way.

### The Calves, A Primer

*(may contain more info than you want to know)*

The calves are composed of two major muscles (see **Figure 1**, right): the gastrocnemius (long word meaning "belly of the leg") and the soleus (meaning "sandal" or "flat of the foot"). The gastrocnemius (a.k.a., "gastroc") is the larger of the two muscles and is the one most commonly associated with the calves. It originates from the back side of the femur (large leg bone) and inserts into the calcaneus (heel bone) via the Achilles tendon. This muscle is responsible for plantarflexion of the foot (pointing the toes down). The soleus is a deeper muscle that originates from the head and body of the fibula (little bone of the leg) and inserts into the calcaneus as well. This muscle is responsible for plantarflexion of the foot when the knee is bent. Both of these muscles work together to help us walk, run, dance, stand up straight, and jump. They're so important!

**Figure 1: Looking Under the Hood - Calf Muscles Revealed**



*Everything is connected by design! Having tight calves means the muscles pull on the Achilles Tendon, which in turn pulls on the muscles and tendons on the foot, like the plantar fascia and others, causing problems and pain. But there's a way to help fix that! Read on, friends...*

## Calf Raises - not just for short people anymore

If you're a Hobbit-sized individual such as myself, calf raises are a normal part of everyday living - just reaching for anything on a shelf higher than eye level puts us onto our toes and into a calf raise. And even if you're not short there are benefits to performing calf raises regularly:

- Calf raises can help improve balance and stability, and we could all use some of that!
- They can help increase strength and mobility in the lower legs, helping to stabilize the ankles and feet (*a personal favorite*).
- They can be used to help correct muscle imbalances in the lower body.
- Calf raises can help improve posture and reduce lower back pain.
- They can help increase power and endurance in the lower legs, which can help with sports performance, running errands, or running after dogs and/or children.

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YOU CAN DO CALF RAISES ANYWHERE YOU ARE...BOUNCING A CHILD ON YOUR KNEE DEFINITELY COUNTS!

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Figure 2 - Calf Raise Foot Positions



Foot position #1: Foot position #2: Foot position #3:

Like the #11  
(parallel)

toes pointing  
inward

toes pointing  
outward

## Calf Raises 3 Ways (standing or seated)

You can do calf raises anywhere you are - brushing your teeth, doing dishes, standing in line, etc. They can also be done seated - in fact, bouncing a child on your knee definitely counts - it's a weighted calf raise!

### The Set Up:

To begin, you may want something to hold on to, like a wall, chair, counter, friend, hopes, dreams, etc., using 1 or both hands for balance. If seated, you may want to grab a weight, child, dog, etc. You will start out with 1 to 2 sets of 10 to 12 reps with a little break in between, then work your way up to 3 sets of 12 to 15 reps.

### Here Comes the Boom:

Each time you lift your heels off of the floor, **SQUEEZE** your butt, **BRING** your thighs in toward each other, and **DRAW** your belly button in toward your spine. Doing this will help to strengthen those ankles and keep them from bowing or sickling out. It also helps keep you upright! Win-win-win!

You will perform the reps in three different foot positions (see **Figure 2** on the left).

- 1) Feet parallel - look down and make sure they look like the number "11" - this works both heads of the gastrocnemius (such a long word!) as well as the soleus.
- 2) Feet inward - point those toes inward like they're getting ready to kiss. Mwah! This works the inside or medial head of the gastroc more.
- 3) Feet outward - pretend you're a ballerina and get into 1st position! This isolates the outside or lateral head of the gastroc more.

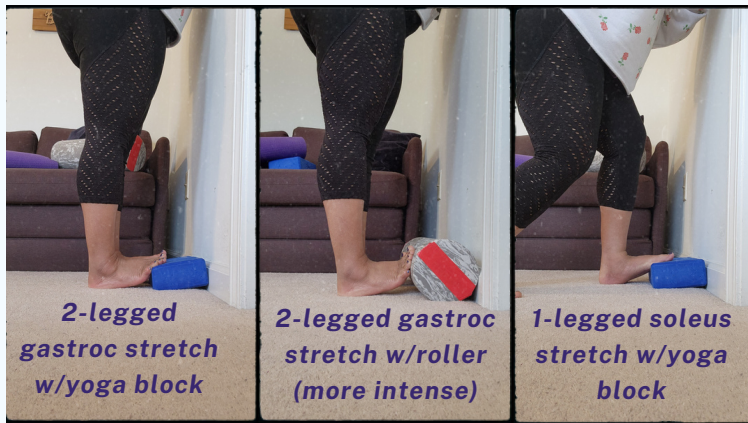
You're welcome! Let's continue, shall we?



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## Calf stretches, not just for after workouts anymore

If you've worked out, or just did all of those calf raises above, then stretching seems like a natural progression, and it is. Go for it! But did you know, that if you have feet and use them every day, you need to stretch your calves every day? Our calves are shortened by wearing lifted-heel shoes/sneakers (lifted heel = anything that lifts your heel above the rest of your foot at barefoot level) and sitting for hours (like I am right now).



*Figure 3: Stretch those calves - your body will thank you!!*

### Benefits of Stretching Your Calves

- Calf stretches can help improve the flexibility of your calf muscles, which can help reduce the risk of injury during physical activities.
- Regular calf stretching can improve your balance and coordination, which can help you to perform better in sports and other activities in life.
- Stretching your calves can help reduce soreness and tightness in your muscles, allowing you to walk and run more comfortably.
- Calf stretches can improve your posture by helping to align your hips with your ankles, which can help to reduce back pain or discomfort, neck tension, and even headaches you may be experiencing.  
*(Everything's connected - that's Divine Design, baby!)*
- Increased flexibility in your calf muscles can help to improve your range of motion and overall mobility.
- Stretching your calf muscles may help improve the symptoms of plantar fasciitis, bunions & other foot problems.

### Stretching Options:

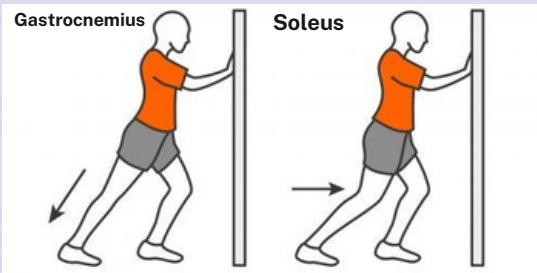
You have a couple of options when it comes to stretching - you may choose to foam roll the muscle before stretching it, or just stretch them. If you'd like to roll and stretch, I have a video that shows you how. Follow this link: [RRD-Calves & Shins](#). I also have a simple calf stretch shown in **Figure 4** to help you isolate the gastroc & soleus.

We will concentrate on one really good stretch for the gastroc & soleus that you can do anywhere (see **Figure 3**, left), standing or seated. For this stretch you'll need either a rolled-up yoga mat, a yoga block, a foam roller up against a wall, or a tightly rolled-up towel. If you're seated, you will only need a towel.

Stand with your feet in the shape of the number "11" (parallel), keeping shoulders over hips and hips over ankles. Keeping this position is key to a good and effective stretch. Place the balls of your feet on the item you are using to aid in stretching. Lean your body forward, legs straight, until you find a stretch in the upper portion of your calves. Hold for 30 seconds, up to 1 minute, relax, then repeat 2 more times (total of 3 sets). To stretch your soleus, repeat the 3 sets of stretches, but with bent knees. The stretch can be intense, especially the higher your toes are, but it's VERY effective. Try to do this at least once per day. You may also do this one leg at a time. Options.

If you're seated, take an open towel and with bare or stocking feet (do we say that anymore?), put the towel underneath the ball of your favorite foot (don't tell the other one), and with a straight leg, pull your toes toward your face with the towel. Hold for 30 seconds to 1 minute, rest, then repeat up to 2 more times. To stretch your soleus, bend your knee and pull those toes up toward your face with the towel, again holding for 30 seconds to 1 minute, up to 3 sets. Repeat with the other leg. DONE!

Figure 4: Simple Calf Stretch



Try it and find out!

1. Find your **gastrocnemius** - do an ordinary calf stretch with your hands against a wall. You should feel a stretch in the upper portion of your calf. That's your gastrocnemius.
2. Find your **soleus** - do that ordinary calf stretch again, this time bending the back leg. You should feel the stretch lower down in the leg. That's your soleus.

Choose Your Weapon:

If you find that these stretches are really helping you, as they should, and you want to really get serious about it, you can choose to purchase one of the items below (both are under \$20, see Figure 5). The calf wedges are basically a one-trick pony, whereas the 1/2 foam roller is much more versatile and can be used for other body parts. Again, options!

Figure 5: Calf Stretch Aids



It comes in purple?? I'm getting one!

Both can be found on Amazon.com

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IF YOU HAVE FEET & USE THEM EVERYDAY, YOU NEED TO STRETCH YOUR CALVES EVERY DAY. THEY'LL THANK YOU!

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Parting Words...

Welp, that's enough about calves, dear ones. I pray this was informative and not too tedious of a read. I'd love to hear from you as to what you thought if you have any questions, a specific body part or exercise you'd like me to break down in the coming issues, make the font bigger, or what have you. And while you eagerly await the next issue, be sure to visit the website for the classes of the week (yay! they're back!!) found on the on-demand video library. I also have a few spots available for personal training, if you prefer that one-on-one attention, or just want me all to yourself.

Until next time, remember that you're awesomely & wonderfully made because you are loved!

Comments, questions, prayer requests, etc.?  
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