

for Integrated Movement

As a physical therapist emphasizing myofascial release and integrated movement, I like to augment my hands-on and exercise treatments with home programs that include foam rollers for soft tissue mobilization, and balls or gadgets to release “knots” in the muscles and fascia.

A metal folding chair is another valuable tool for self-treatment. It is indestructible and stores in a closet or behind a door. It is a great value—\$15 at your favorite box store.

A person can accomplish multiple stretches and joint range of motion (ROM) from the following pose, using a chair or the lower steps of a stairway: Place one foot on the floor and the other on the seat of the chair and grasp the back of the chair for security. The leg of the lower foot is kept straight, stretching the “gastroc” muscles of the calf and the hip flexors (psoas and company). This also takes the hip and knee into full extension and the ankle into forward bending or dorsiflexion (see first photo, above).

The leg with the foot-on-the-seat is thus bent (flexed) at the hip, knee and ankle. One can change the emphasis of either knee or hip ROM



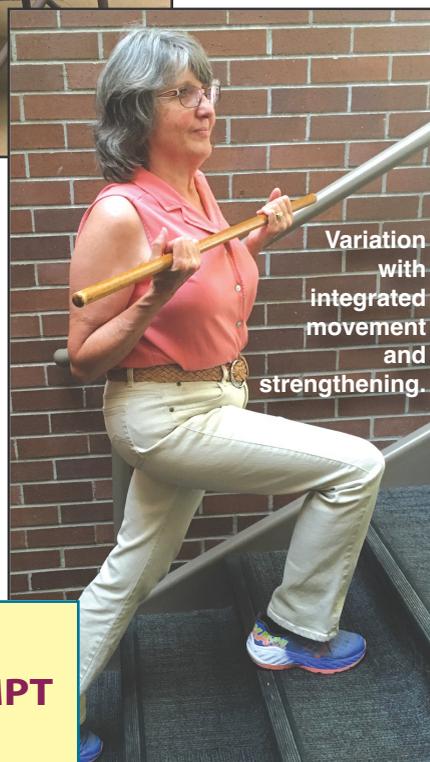
Basic foot-on-chair pose.

by shifting weight forward, or “bowing” over the top foot. This pose stretches the gluteus maximus and deep muscles of the hip, three of the four quadriceps, and the muscles beneath the gastrocs.

The same stretches and ROM can be accomplished by placing the upper foot on the second step of a stairway. (Use the third step if you are tall, or the first step if your ROM is quite limited.) Active ROM of internal and external rotation of the hips is addressed by turning the pelvis toward the upper foot. By doing this, the ball-and-socket joint of the hips rotate in opposite directions at the same time, which is part of the pattern of movement while walking.

The longer the pose is held, the more the fascia and muscle fibers adapt to the position. Try it for two minutes, with easy-to-moderate force.

And do both sides.



Variation with integrated movement and strengthening.

A good strengthening component can be added to this pose by raising up onto the toes of the lower foot, which activates the gastrocs and “glutes”—often inhibited or weak components of movement. These muscles need to be strong and participating to avoid “compensatory” movement patterns during standing, walking, running or...climbing stairs! Compensatory movement patterns lead to chronic pain in the back and hip areas. Try to come up onto the toes and turn the pelvis together: 3–5 repetitions slowly and switch sides.

Optimize good body mechanics with a neutral spine by keeping the shoulder blades together, pulling a dowel or other prop to your chest (as shown in second photo). This maximizes hip extension and rotation, resulting in power and stability from the largest muscles of the body. There are numerous other exercises that can be fashioned with a sturdy chair. This one increases mobility and encourages movement with integrated patterns. ■

TERRY KENNEDY, MPT

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