



# Airplane Yoga

## Six Easy Stretches Ease the Journey

by Cynthia Bowman

The majority of the symptoms we can experience during flying—stiffness, poor circulation and swollen feet—are due to lack of movement rather than the altitude or pressurized cabin air. Knowing this can make healthy flying easier.

Drinking lots of water and moving about and stretching every two to three hours on long flights is key; trips to the bathroom naturally help fulfill this. We also can keep blood from collecting in our lower extremities by finding a way to elevate our legs and feet periodically. Wiggle all 10 toes, shift positions and go for these six discreet airplane yoga stretches.

**ETIQUETTE TIP:** Do the first two stretches at the back of the plane with

adequate space and a wall to lean on. Don't do these in the aisle; hanging on to someone's seat back rocks it and can be annoying.

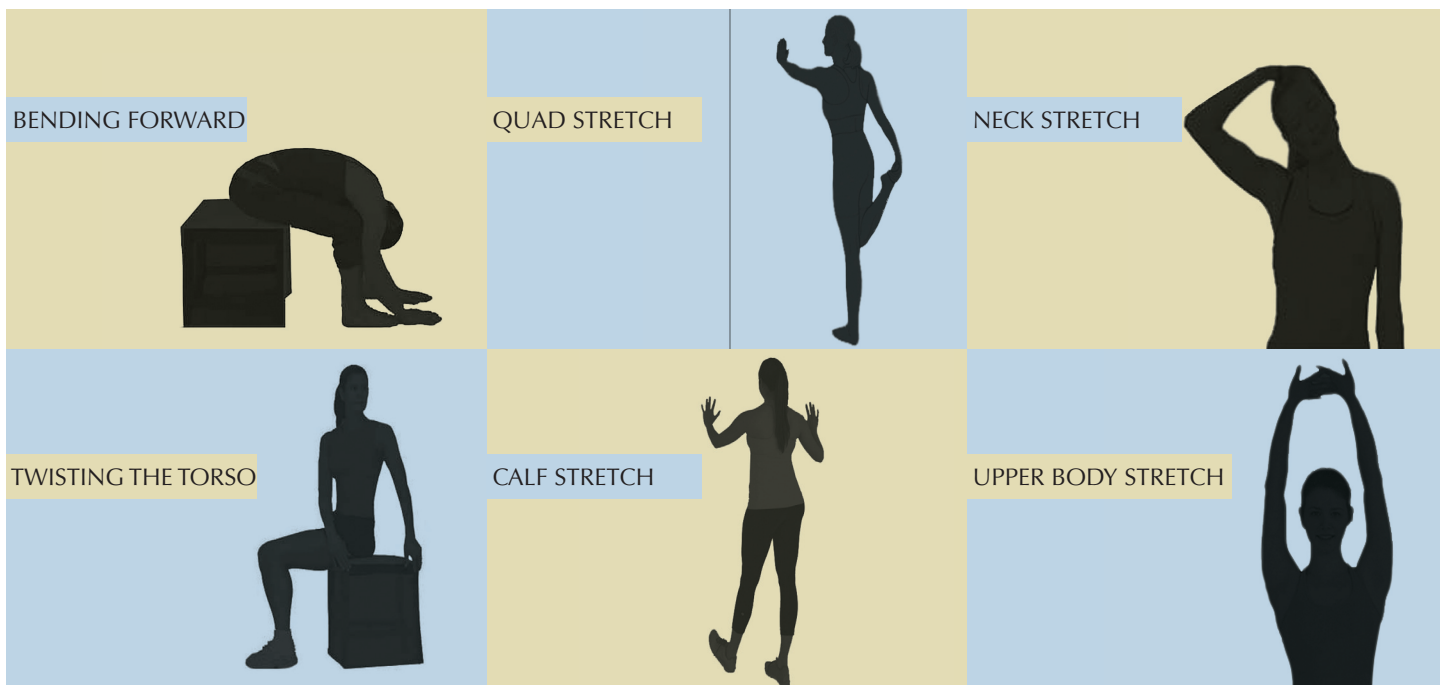
A quad stretch involves the shoulders, upper legs, calves and ankles, while elevating each foot and getting the blood moving. Hang on to a wall, grab an ankle and bring the heel as close to the butt as possible. Then rotate the ankle in a circular motion. Do this as long as it feels worth doing, and then switch arms and legs.

A calf stretch is a simple way to target calf and hamstring muscles, as well as ankles. Stand facing a wall, placing both hands at shoulder height on the wall for balance, elbows bent. Take one

foot forward and rest it on its heel, with toes pointing up and resting on the wall. Lean forward to the point of feeling a good stretch in the calf. Stretch 30 seconds per foot, gradually going deeper into the pose after a few breaths.

**ETIQUETTE TIP:** The next four stretches can be done in an airplane seat or in the back of the plane.

The upper body stretch targets wrists, hands, arms, shoulders, back and the upper body in general. Sit upright with feet firmly planted on the floor. Lift arms up and interlace fingers before turning palms to face the ceiling. Relax the shoulders and neck. The arms shouldn't be covering the ears and can be adjusted by moving them a few



inches forward or back. Tall individuals may need to bend their elbows, which still allows for stretching of the upper body.

Neck stretches release tension and stiffness by tilting the head from side-to-side. Don't make circular motions, as they can cause neck and spine compression. If holding the head to assist a deeper stretch, be considerate of neighbors by pointing the raised elbow forward to cradle the neck instead of resting it on a seatmate.

Twisting the torso benefits both the spine and back muscles. Yogis believe that twisting motions also massage internal organs. While twisting, hang on to the armrest with both hands and sit as upright as possible, with legs together and feet firmly planted. Don't bounce into the pose or shift or lift buttocks off the seat, but make slow, fluid movements.

Bending forward while seated gives the back, neck and legs a good, deep stretch.

All of these movements work well while we're in the air and are equally useful on road trips, in the office or whenever we need a break.

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