**Low Back and Hip Stretches**

A study performed at the University of North Carolina revealed that 80 percent of people will experience some form of low back pain during their life. Generally, as people age their spine will begin to degenerate, degeneration in the spine leads to decreased disc space between the vertebrae which can increase pain in the back. Flexion of the lumbar spine decreases pressure in the low back. Sciatic nerve irritation can create low back and hip pain which can spread to the lower limbs. The following exercises will teach how to improve your low back and hip pain through stretching. Remember that stretching may cause mild pain which is normal. Please do not overstretch the muscle and if the stretch is causing moderate to severe pain than please discontinue.

1. **Prayer Stretch-** While kneeling on the ground, tuck your lower legs underneath the back of your legs and sit back on your heels and bend forward at your waist. Extend you arms out over your head onto the floor. Hold for 30 seconds and sit back up.  Repeat 2-3 times.
2. **Single Knee to Chest-** Bring both hands behind the leg and pull back towards your chest until a light stretch is felt down the back of the leg. You can also place hands over the bent leg on the shin or knee and pull towards your chest.  Hold for 30 seconds, switch legs and use the same procedure. Repeat 2-3 times for each leg.
3. **Core Stabilization-** Lay flat on the ground with your knees bent and arms resting by your side or behind your head, tighten your abdominal muscles (as if bracing for a punch to the stomach) and press the small of the back into the floor.  Hold this position for 5-10 seconds and repeat 5-10times. Remember to keep your shoulders and feet flat to the ground and breathe normally.
4. **Lying Piriformis Stretch**- In a lying position with your knees bent, cross the painful leg over the other leg and then grab the non-painful leg with both hands and slowly pull the leg back towards your chest. Hold the position for 10-15 seconds and repeat 2-3 times.
5. **Seated Piriformis Stretch**- While seated in a comfortable firm chair, sit closer to the edge of the chair to allow you to bend forward. While keeping your back straight and hips firmly on the chair, bring the painful leg over the other. Then bring your chest forward and bend forward slowly and hold for 2-3 breaths. Bring your body back to neutral and repeat 2-3 times.
6. **Lying Piriformis Side Stretch**- While in a lying position with both legs and your back flat, bend the painful leg up and bring the foot on the outside of the other leg near the knee. Gently pull at the knee of the painful leg across the midline of the body and hold for 2-3 breaths and repeat 2-3 times.
7. **Lumbar Rotation**- While in a lying position, bend both knees with feet flat on the ground. Gently move both knees from one side to the other 10 times while breathing normally. Repeat 2-3 times.