

# Self-Care STRETCHES

IC-friendly stretching can help relax the pelvic floor.

Stretching with IC can relax the pelvic floor and surrounding muscles, releasing the stress and tension that builds up in the pelvic region. Nicole Cozean, PT, DPT, WCS, CSCS, developed the PelvicSanity IC Stretching Regimen, which includes the gentle stretches illustrated on the following pages. Cozean recommends at least 20 minutes of stretching each day for her patients with IC, which represents two circuits through these exercises.

## Stretching Tips:

**All gain, no pain.** Stretching shouldn't hurt. If you do feel pain, ease backwards until it is comfortable again. You should never feel any numbness or tingling.

**Relax into stretches.** You should be holding each stretch for at least 60 seconds, feeling the body start to relax into the stretch.

**Deep breathing.** This is a great chance to practice deep breathing, helping the body to relax and deepen the stretches. Breathe in for at least three seconds, expanding your belly and filling your lungs completely. Hold your breath for a moment before you slowly exhale. Pay attention to your breath and visualize stress leaving your body with each exhale.

*Photos and summary descriptions reprinted with permission from The Interstitial Cystitis Solution, by Nicole Cozean. The full PelvicSanity IC Stretching Regimen is available in The Interstitial Cystitis Solution.*



## Happy Baby

*Focus — Pelvic Floor*

One of the only stretches that directly targets the pelvic floor, Happy Baby is a yoga position that can be done on your back. In this position, grab the legs (at the feet, ankles, or calves) and gently pull back towards your chest. Your feet should be close together, with your knees flared wide. Keep your back flat on the floor and head on the ground. Breathe deeply in this position for at least 60 seconds and use the elbows to spread the legs to deepen the stretch. You should also focus on “dropping” the pelvic floor in this stretch, and feeling it relax. Make sure your abdominal muscles are relaxed.

During the stretch, note how your pelvic floor feels; you may even notice an immediate change or relief in symptoms with this stretch.



## Butterfly Stretch

*Focus — Inner Thighs*

Start by lying on your back with your knees raised and pointed to the ceiling, feet on the floor. Slowly let your knees fall outward. You should feel a stretch in your upper inner thighs in this position. If this is difficult or painful, you can slide a pillow under your legs to help support their weight, or start with one leg at a time. As always, continue to work on deep breathing and relaxation during this stretch.

You can also do the stretch sitting up, with the soles of your feet pressed together and arms resting on your legs to help deepen the stretch. This can be a great position if you’re doing something else at the same time (reading, watching TV), but it makes deep breathing a little more challenging, so we generally recommend lying on your back for this stretch.



## Chair Stretch

*Focus — Hamstrings and Inner Thighs*

This stretch targets both the hamstrings and inner thighs. Standing approximately 2-3 feet from a surface, lean over. Start with your feet a little wider than shoulder-width apart. Keeping your back and knees straight, concentrate on lifting the tailbone towards the sky. You should feel a stretch in the backs of your legs. Hold this position, with your legs straight, for 60 seconds.

Without moving your feet or arms, slightly bend one knee while keeping the pelvis back. Leaning slightly in the direction of your bent leg, you should quickly feel a stretch running down the inner thigh of your straight leg. Hold this for 60 seconds and then switch legs and repeat.