



Steeple Movement

The Steeple Movement allows you to release and gain control of the muscles that twist the trunk of the body, in particular the obliques. The exercise involves lying on the back with the arms in the air and the legs crossed, and slowly turning the arms and legs to opposite sides. This exercise helps to relieve postural imbalances, scoliosis, pelvic rotation, and tension and pain in the back, shoulders, and hips.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTION

Starting Position: Lie down on your back on your carpet or exercise mat. Come into your neutral starting position, with your knees bent and feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart.

Upper Body Movement: Reach your arms straight up toward the ceiling, with your palms facing each other, and then bring your palms together to touch. Keep your elbows locked straight, and your arms perfectly vertical.

Slowly start moving your hands to the right. Allow your right shoulder to press down into the floor while your left shoulder starts to lift off the floor. Only go as far as you can comfortably while keeping both elbows straight and your palms together, maintaining the triangle of your arms and shoulder girdle. Don't let one hand slip in front of the other. Then, slowly come back to center where you started. Do this movement a few more times, very slowly twisting to the right, then very slowly coming back. Notice what muscles contract as you twist, and release as you come back to center. When you're done, let your arms come to the floor, and just relax.

Repeat this movement turning toward the left side. Then let your arms come to the floor, and relax.

Lower Body Movement: Now stretch your arms out to the sides on the floor. Cross your left leg all the way over your right leg. Slowly start lowering your knees down to the left side. When you've lowered partway down, start slowly lifting your knees back up, just about halfway, and notice what muscles help you do that. Then very slowly and gently start releasing to let your knees lower down to the left side again. You can let them lower down farther this time if it's comfortable for you. Do this several more times, slowly lifting your knees back up, and then very slowly and gently releasing to let your knees lower back down to the left. When you've repeated this several times, and lowered down as far as you want to, gently let your pelvis roll to the right so that your legs come up to center.

Uncross your legs, and cross your right leg over your left leg. Repeat this movement, lowering your knees down to the right side.

Full Movement: Start with your knees bent and feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart. Cross your left leg all the way over your right leg. Reach your arms up toward the ceiling and bring your palms together, and keep your elbows straight.

First, start very slowly turning your upper body to the right. When you've gone about halfway as far as you can go, start letting your knees lower down to the left. Do your best to let your arms and your legs travel the same distance away from center. You'll find that neither your arms nor your legs can go as far as they did before, and that's okay. When you've gone as far as you can comfortably, slowly and gently bring your arms and your legs back up to center.

Repeat this movement one or two more times, starting with your arms and then bringing your legs into the movement. Keep your elbows straight and your palms together. Try to let both your arms and your legs travel the same distance away from center.

When you're done, slowly and gently come back to center, and let your arms come down to the floor, and relax. Then cross your right leg all the way over your left leg, and do the full movement to the other side.

ANATOMY OF THE STEEPLE MOVEMENT

The Steeple Movement works with the muscles that rotate the spine to either side:

- Internal and external obliques
- Multifidi
- Rotatores

CONDITIONS HELPED BY THE STEEPLE MOVEMENT

The Steeple Movement helps to alleviate the following conditions:

- Back tension and pain
- Disc problems
- Scoliosis
- Neck tightness and pain
- Shoulder tightness and pain
- Tightness in the abdominals
- Pelvic rotation

HOW TO TEACH THE STEEPLE MOVEMENT

Get the student in their starting position. The student should lie down on their back on their carpet or exercise mat with their knees bent and feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart.

Invite the student to close their eyes. Closing their eyes removes all the visual information that their brain would otherwise have to process. Keeping the eyes closed allows the student to focus completely on their internal sensations.

Teach the upper body movement. Instruct your student to reach their arms straight up toward the ceiling with their palms facing each other. Then they can bring their palms together. Instruct your student to keep their elbows locked, their palms together (not sliding apart), and their arms perfectly vertical (not falling toward their head or their feet) throughout the exercise.

Tell your student to slowly start moving their hands to the right, keeping the triangle of their arms and shoulder girdle intact. They will feel their right shoulder press down into the floor, and their left shoulder lift off the floor. They should only go as far as is comfortable for them while keeping their elbows straight and palms together. Ask them to notice their waist muscles contracting. Then the student can slowly release their waist muscles to slowly come back to center. Talk your student through this movement one or two more times, then let them relax their arms on the floor. When the student is ready, talk them through doing the movement turning toward the left side.

Teach the lower body movement. Have your student relax their arms out to the sides on the floor, and cross their left leg all the way over their right leg. Instruct your student to slowly lower their knees down to their left side, about halfway as far as they can go. Then instruct them to slowly lift their knees back up a little bit, noticing what muscles they feel contracting. Then they can slowly lower down to the left again, slowly releasing those muscles. They can lower their knees down a little farther this time if it's comfortable for them. Talk your student through this process a few more times: lifting their knees up a little, feeling the muscles that are working, and then slowly releasing and lowering down. When the student has lowered their knees as far down as they want to, tell them to gently roll their pelvis to the right so that their knees come back up to center. Then tell your student to uncross their legs and relax for a moment before talking them through this movement on the other side (right leg crossed over left leg, and lowering knees down to the right side).

Teach the full movement. Instruct your student to cross their left leg all the way over their right leg, reach their arms up toward the ceiling, and bring their palms together. Tell them to start by turning just their arms toward the right, keeping their elbows straight, palms together, and the triangle of their arms and shoulder girdle intact. When they've turned their arms about halfway as far as they can go, they can start

lowering their knees down to the left side. Ask your student to try to lower their arms and knees the same distance away from center. When they've gone as far as they can go comfortably, tell them to slowly come back up to center. Talk them through one or two more repetitions of this movement, then let them rest their arms and feet on the floor before doing the full movement on the other side (with arms turning to left, right leg crossed over the left leg, and knees lowering down to right side).

Notes:

The full movement is taught by first moving the arms, then bringing the legs into the movement, because the legs are heavier than the arms and people will tend to lower them faster. In order to keep the body balanced and encourage the student to lower the arms and legs the same distance away from center, it is best to teach them to start lowering the arms first.

If your student has a very arched back, it will be helpful if they do a gentle flatten before beginning the movement, and try to keep their back gently flattened throughout the movement. This will allow them to work with their obliques more effectively, and avoid putting strain on their tight back muscles.

Common mistakes:

The most common mistake in the Steeple Movement is letting the lower elbow bend or the hands slip apart. If the elbow bends or the hands slip apart, there is no added benefit. The student must focus on using their obliques to twist to either side. Keeping their elbows straight and their hands together forces the student to focus on twisting through their midsection.

If you see that your student is pushing past their limit and turning this into a stretch, remind them that it is not a stretch. This benefit of this movement is not in how far they turn to either side, but in keeping correct form and learning to engage their obliques in a balanced way.

The following is an example of how I teach the Steeple Movement:

Lie down on your back on your carpet or exercise mat. Come into your neutral starting position, with your knees bent and feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart. Get comfortable here, so that you feel like you're using little to no effort to stay in this position.

You'll learn this movement in two parts, then you'll put it together. Reach your arms straight up toward the ceiling, with your palms facing each other, and now bring your palms together to touch. Keep your elbows locked straight, and your arms perfectly vertical – not falling toward your head or toward your feet.

Notice the triangle that you're creating with your arms and your shoulder girdle. Your arms should be straight, and there should be a straight line in between your shoulders that finishes off the triangle. Your goal is to keep this triangle intact as you do this movement.

Now, slowly start moving your hands to the right. Keep both elbows straight and your hands together, and don't let one hand slide in front of the other hand. Allow your right shoulder to press down into the floor while your left shoulder starts to lift off the floor. Only go as far as you can comfortably while keeping both elbows straight and your palms together. Then, slowly come back to center where you started.

Do this movement a few more times, very slowly twisting to the right, then very slowly coming back. You may find that you can go a little farther each time. The twisting is happening in your midsection to allow the triangle of your arms and shoulder girdle to stay intact. Notice your obliques contracting to help you turn to the side, and releasing as you come back to center.

If you are bending your right elbow or letting your palms slide apart, you are not getting the benefit of this movement. It doesn't matter if you can only twist one inch to the right – you must keep both elbows straight and keep your hands together. This will force you to use the muscles in your midsection to do the twisting.

When you're done, let your arms come to the floor, and just relax.

When you're ready, reach your arms straight up toward the ceiling, with your palms facing each other, and then bring your palms together. Keep your elbows locked straight, and your arms perfectly vertical – not falling toward your head or toward your feet.

Now, slowly start turning to the left, keeping both elbows straight and your palms together. Allow your left shoulder to press down into the floor while your right shoulder starts to lift off the floor. Keep that triangle intact. Only go as far as you can comfortably while keeping both elbows straight and your palms together. Then, slowly come back to center where you started.

Do this movement a few more times, very slowly twisting to the left, then very slowly coming back. You may find that you can go a little farther each time. Feel the twisting that is happening in your midsection to allow the triangle of your arms and shoulder girdle to stay intact. Notice your obliques contracting to help you turn to the side, and releasing as you come back to center.

Remember, keep both elbows straight and your palms together. It's fine if you can only twist one inch to the left– you must keep both elbows straight and your palms together. This will force you to use the muscles in your midsection to do the twisting.

When you're done, let your arms come to the floor, and just relax.

Now, stretch your arms out to the sides on the floor. Cross your left leg all the way over your right leg. Your left leg will act as a weight in this movement.

Slowly start lowering your legs down to the left side. You'll feel the right side of your waist and your right hip start to lengthen. When you've lowered partway down, start slowly lifting your knees back up. Not all the way, just bring them back about halfway. You should be feeling the muscles in your right waist, your right buttocks, and right hip working to help you bring your knees up. Then very slowly and gently start releasing these muscles to let your knees lower down to the left side again. You can let them lower down farther this time if it's comfortable for you.

Do this several more times, slowly lifting your knees back up, feeling the contraction of the muscles that are working, and then very slowly and gently releasing these muscles to let your legs lower back down to the left. Remember, this is not a stretch, but a slow, controlled release of these muscles. You might feel the release all the way up to the front of your right shoulder.

When you've repeated this several times, and lowered down as far as you want to, gently let your pelvis roll to the right so that your legs come up to center. Uncross your legs, and now cross your right leg over your left leg.

Slowly start lowering your legs down to the right side. You'll feel the left side of your waist and your left hip start to lengthen. When you've lowered partway down, start slowly lifting your knees back up. Not all the way, just bring them back about halfway. You should be feeling the muscles in your left waist, your left buttocks, and left hip working to help you bring your knees up. Then very slowly and gently start releasing these muscles to let your knees lower down to the right side again. You can let them lower down farther this time if it's comfortable for you.

Do this several more times, slowly lifting your knees back up, feeling the contraction of the muscles that are working, and then very slowly and gently releasing these muscles to let your legs lower back down to the right. Remember, this is not a stretch, but a slow, controlled release of these muscles. You might feel the release all the way up to the front of your left shoulder.

When you've repeated this several times, and lowered down as far as you want to, gently let your pelvis roll to the left so that your legs come up to center. Uncross your legs, and stretch them down on the floor if you want to, and just relax.

Now you're going to put these two movements together. Start with your knees bent and feet on the floor, a comfortable hip width distance apart. Cross your left leg all the way over your right leg. Reach your arms up toward the ceiling and bring your palms together, and keep your elbows straight.

First, start very slowly twisting your upper body to the right, keeping that triangle intact.

When you've gone about halfway as far as you can go, start letting your knees lower down to the left. Do your best to let your arms and your legs travel the same distance away from center. You'll find that neither your arms or your legs can go as far as they did before, and that's okay. When you've gone as far as you can comfortably, slowly and gently bring your arms and your legs back up to center.

Repeat this movement one or two more times, starting with your arms and then bringing your legs into the movement. Keep your elbows straight and your palms together. Try to let both your arms and your legs travel the same distance away from center.

When you're done, slowly and gently come back to center, and let your arms come down to the floor, and relax.

When you're ready, cross your right leg all the way over your left leg. Reach your arms up toward the ceiling and bring your palms together, and keep your elbows straight.

First, start very slowly twisting your upper body to the left, keeping that triangle intact. When you've gone about halfway as far as you can go, start letting your knees lower down to the right. Do your best to let your arms and your legs travel the same distance. You'll find that neither your arms or your legs can go as far as they did before, and that's okay. When you've gone as far as you can comfortably, slowly and gently bring your arms and your legs back up to center.

Go ahead and repeat this movement one or two more times, starting with your arms and then bringing your legs into the movement. Keep your elbows straight and your palms together. Try to let both your arms and your legs travel the same distance away from center.

When you're done, slowly and gently come back to center. Let your arms come down to the floor, uncross your legs and stretch them out if you want, and just relax.