

# Cobra Stretch

**Do it Right!**  
Exercises you Should Do

**Types (progression):** Also known as the McKenzie Press-up, Sloppy Push-up, and the Yoga Pose “Bhujangasana”. This movement/stretch is one of my favorites movements/stretches to do especially after exercise. I consider it a foundation exercise and a restorative movement. **KEY:** Always go to your first resistance barrier and stop if you have pain. Pain while doing this could be a sign of an underlying back issue. This is also used as a Clearing Test (used to rule out disease or disorder). This exercise is not for everyone. I consider it a foundation exercise for many.

**Performance:** You can hold it for 15 or more seconds to make it a stretch, 1-3 x sets. As a movement you can go in and out of cobra for several or more repetitions, **Form:** Starting Position: Lie prone (on your stomach) on an exercise mat or floor with your hands by your sides, positioned directly under your shoulders and hands facing forward. Extend your legs and plantar flex your ankles (toes point away from body). Upward Phase: Gently exhale and press your hips into the mat or floor and pull your chin and then chest away from the ground while keeping your hips stable.

This will arch your low back and stretch the muscles in your chest and abdominal region. An aggressive version has you lifting abdomen off floor, while a safe version just has you placing a fist under chin. Hold this position for 15 - 30 seconds Downward Phase: Gently relax and lower your upper body to rest back upon the mat or floor. If you experience any pain in the low back with this movement, stop the exercise immediately and consult with your doctor.

**This exercise is not for everyone and in some cases it may cause pain.** Physical therapist Robin McKenzie introduced the McKenzie Press-up as part of a series of exercises to combat low back pain. Many medical doctors, physical therapists, chiropractors have advocated this exercise, but again it is not for everyone. **If you do them you should limit how far you go back based on comfort and never go into pain.** What research has shown is that the McKenzie Press-ups (extensions) only work in **intervertebral discs with 70% of their disc height or more remaining.** **In other words someone young.** Anything below 70% in disc height results in a failure of the McKenzie Press-up to work. Other research suggest repeated bouts of this exercise in those with osteoarthritis can elicit more pain. So if you are young this exercise may be for you. If you are older or if you have osteoarthritis doing a limited version of this exercise or none at all may be appropriate (example: from prone position just go into extension a slight amount or with fist stacked under chin (see upper picture).

Difference between doing a movement and stretch: In a stretch the end position is held for 15+ seconds, while a movement is a slow back and forth motion with no end held position.



Cobra- Chin Stacked Under Chin



Cobra- Chest and Partial Ribs off Floor



Cobra- Chest, Ribs, and Abdomen off Floor