Two tests you can do to check if your calves are tight and stretches to fix lack of flexibility.

Both tests can give you a good idea of how tight/short your calf muscles are. Once you have established your current situation, you can start doing something about it with an intensive period of stretching daily and then repeating the test weekly.

Knee to wall test, ankle flexibility test:
You’ll need a ruler or a tape measure.

1. stand facing a wall with about 10cm between your big toe and wall.
2. move one foot backward so it is about a foot behind the leg you are testing. (one leg at a time)
3. now bend your front knee until the kneecap touches the wall, keeping the heel on ground!!!!!
4. If your knee cannot reach the wall without your heel coming off ground, inch your foot closer to the wall and try again.
5. If your knee was able to touch the wall too easily with the 10cm set up without your heel coming off the ground, move foot further away from wall and try again.
6. repeat step 4 or 5 until you can just touch kneecap to the wall while your heel stays on ground.
7. Measure and record the distance between wall and big toe (take into consideration if there is a skirting board attached, deduct the depth of that from your reading.)

Do repeat the test on the other leg; ideally both calves will have the same reading.
Bearing in mind that there can be some validity issues with the wall to big toe measurement with respect to the proportions between your leg length and foot length. If you are very tall, it is likely you will only have the minimum distance measurement required. If you are quite short you will probably not get the minimum distance. Therefore, it is generally considered better practice to use the angle position of the shinbone when interpreting the results.

I suggest you do the next test too to get confirmation of how tight your calves are.

Keep a record of your results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial test date:</th>
<th>Re-test date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right leg:</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left leg:</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Smaller than 9-10cm is considered a restricted, shortened calf muscle.
Feet in the air, calf tension test:

Evaluate how much tension is in your calves.

1. lying on your back, bring your knees to your chest so that you can position both shins vertically.
2. you may need to add a pillow under your lower back if your hamstrings are particularly tight stopping you from bringing the lower leg into a vertical position
3. Relax the whole lower leg (feet, toes, ankles and calves - even the head and mouth) Don’t cheat by adjusting your ankle position to get a better reading, you can only improve something if you know your real starting point.
4. Get someone to take a side-on photo or look in a mirror.

How did you do?
Ideally the sole of the foot would be parallel to the floor, creating a 90degree angle at the ankle. The more your foot points to the sky the tighter/ shorter your calves are. You may already feel the stretch by flexing your big toe toward your nose in the test position.

Now that you have evidence of your current calf muscle length you can work on improving the range of ankle flexion each of your calf muscles permit.

Stretch routine for rapid improvement:

Implement a stretch routine before going to bed. This is the best time to stretch muscles, as your body will repair any tissue between 22:30-2am in the new lengthened position. Do the stretching daily until you have improved to 90degrees. I suggest re-taking the tests every 1-2weeks; It is not good to have overly long muscles.

If there was a difference between the results of left and right leg, stretch the leg that has more tension an extra repetition. i.e. right leg was tighter, stretch left leg once, and right leg twice.
We need to ensure both calves have the same tension/ ankles have the same range of mobility.
Hold every stretch for 1 minute for speedy results. Ensure you breathe evenly and deeply into your tummy to encourage the body to let go of the tension in the muscle.

Evaluate if you need to perform both of the stretches or just one, by testing them both out, taking note of the intensity that each stretch provides. If it feels like a 1-3 out of 10 (10 being it stretches intensely, 1 it does not stretch at all) the stretch is not a priority. If it is between 4-10 you should include it.

**Stretching the prominent part of the calf, the gastrocnemius:**

Drop the heel off the edge of a stair or box.
The knee needs to be fully straight to stretch the prominent calf, gastrocnemius muscle.
Keep the upper body upright.

**Keep a record of your stretch perception:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial test date:</th>
<th>Re-test date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right leg: Scale 1-10</td>
<td>Right leg: Scale 1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left leg: Scale 1-10</td>
<td>Left leg: Scale 1-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stretching the lower calf, the soleus:**

Drop the heel off the edge of a stair or box.
The knee needs to be slightly bent to stretch the lower calf, soleus muscle.
Keep the upper body upright.

**Keep a record of your stretch perception:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial test date:</th>
<th>Re-test date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right leg: Scale 1-10</td>
<td>Right leg: Scale 1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left leg: Scale 1-10</td>
<td>Left leg: Scale 1-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can also use a slant calf stretch board to stretch your calves. I find it much easier to rest into a steady stretch with my wedge board that I built myself. Place it so that your back is against a wall.
The wooden versions are quite expensive but here is a link for a cheaper one that is made of plastic.

If you liked this guide document, I would welcome a quick comment underneath the blog post.
Feel free to email me with any question you may have.
Happy Stretching.