

Flexibility and Stretching

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Muscles that are regularly stretched are less tense, less painful and less likely to be injured. Stretching should not be stressful or painful. Technique is important. Increasing flexibility is a long slow process – it is not necessary or desirable to push further each day. Stretches should be individualized to each person’s structure, age and dysfunction.

Why Stretch

- Decreases muscle tension
- Promotes relaxation
- Allows for easier movement of joints
- Increases range of motion allowing more movement
- Helps decrease the possibility of strain and injury
- Promotes circulation
- Decreases achiness in muscles and joints

When to stretch

Stretching can be done at any time of the day. It can help decrease tension in the middle of your workday or help you slow down after a busy day. Warm muscles will allow more intense stretching. You may find it helpful to heat the muscle (with a heating pad or shower) before stretching. This is especially helpful if the muscle is tight and tender. In most cases it is more effective to do stretches at the end of the work out.

How to Stretch

Hold each stretch 10 to 30 seconds and repeat 3 to 5 times. Some stretches are held even longer. Yoga is an excellent form of stretch and exercise and often involves long holding. DO NOT BOUNCE!!! Slowly move into the stretch position and maintain the stretch steady. Relax into the position and breath. Stretches performed too aggressively or too quickly may result in injury to muscles or joints. A gentle “stretch pain” is correct – stretching should not increase your pain in a bad way.

What types of stretches are best?

A good flexibility program includes all areas of the body. There are several good references on stretching that may help you choose the proper exercise. (see below) Many people find it difficult to learn exercise from a book and greatly benefit from individual instruction by a physical therapist, exercise instructor, personal trainer or yoga instructor. A good teacher should be able to help you individualize the exercises for you and your conditions.

- [Stretching by Bob Anderson, Shelter Publications](#)
- [The American Physical Therapy Association Book of Body Maintenance and Repair by Vickery and Moffat, Henry Holt and Company Publishers.](#)

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