

Stretch for your Health

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Stretching should be a part of your daily routine, whether you exercise or not. It does not have to involve a huge time commitment; yet can end up giving you huge results! Here are just a few of the benefits you can expect from a regular stretching program:



- **Reduced muscle tension**
- **Increased range of movement in the joints**
- **Enhanced muscular coordination**
- **Increased circulation**
- **Increased energy levels**
- **Enhanced performance in daily life, sports, or other physical activity**
- **Improved posture**
- **Mental relaxation**

So, how do you begin? It is not necessary to stretch before a workout. Optimally, after a proper warm up, workout, and cool down, it is the time to stretch. Exercise warms the muscles and joints and prepares them to be stretched. Post-exercise stretching can aid in workout recovery, decrease muscle soreness, and ensure that your muscles and tendons are at a good length to function properly. If your program involves only stretching, then an active warm up, such as walking for 5 minutes, is acceptable.

Stretching with the FITT guidelines (Frequency, Intensity, Time, and Type) in mind will ensure you produce effective and safe results:

- **Frequency:** The more frequently you stretch, the more quickly you will gain flexibility. It is recommended you **stretch all your major muscle groups** daily, or at the very least, each time you exercise (a minimum of 3-4 times per week).
- **Intensity:** Stretch in a slow steady motion to the point of “**mild discomfort**”. If it is painful, you have stretched too far.
- **Time:** Hold each stretch for **30 seconds**, repeating one or two more times.
- **Type:** Stretches such as Static (low, sustained force taking the muscle to the point of tension), Active (using the opposite muscle group to move and hold your body into a stretch), and Dynamic (using active force and momentum to take a joint through its full range) all improve your level of flexibility and depend on your fitness level.

Stretching can be highly beneficial if done properly. If done improperly, it can cause serious damage. To ensure you are stretching safely and preventing injury always warm up before stretching. Stretching a cold muscle increases the risk of pulls or tears. To avoid unnecessary stress on the joints do not lock your joints when you stretch. Breathe while stretching for a more relaxing experience. Try moving into the stretch on your exhale. Avoid ballistic or bouncing stretching. Stretch only to a mild discomfort never to the point of pain. You may want to talk to your doctor or physical therapist about any current or former musculoskeletal injuries or problems prior to starting a stretching program.

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