

Stretching Tips for Safely Improving your Flexibility and Minimizing Muscle Pain

Warm Up prior to Stretching

Trying to stretch muscles that have not been warmed, is like trying to stretch old, dry rubber bands, they may snap.

Warming up prior to stretching does a number of beneficial things, but primarily its purpose is to prepare the body and mind for more strenuous activity. One of the ways it achieves this is by helping to increase the body's core temperature while also increasing the body's muscle temperature. By increasing muscle temperature you are helping to make the muscles loose, supple and pliable. This is essential to ensure the maximum benefit is gained from your stretching.

The correct warm-up, also has the effect of increasing both your heart rate and your respiratory rate. This increases blood flow, which in turn increases the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to the working muscles. All this helps to prepare the muscles and tendons for stretching.

Stretch Before AND After Exercise

The question often arises, "should I stretch before or after exercise?" This is not an either / or situation, both are essential. It is no good stretching after exercise and counting that as your pre-exercise stretch for next time. Stretching after exercise has a totally different purpose to stretching before exercise. The two are not the same.

The purpose of stretching before exercise is to help prevent injury. Stretching does this by lengthening the muscles and tendons, which in turn increases your range of movement. This ensures that you are able to move freely without restriction or injury occurring.

However, stretching after exercise has a very different role. Its purpose is primarily to aid in the repair and recovery of the muscles and tendons. By lengthening the muscles and tendons, stretching helps to prevent tight muscles and delayed muscle soreness, which usually accompanies strenuous exercise.

Breathe Slowly & Easily While Stretching

Many people unconsciously hold their breath while stretching. This causes tension in your muscles, which in turn makes it very difficult to stretch.

To avoid this, remember to breathe slowly and easily during your stretching. This promotes blood flow and increases the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to your muscles.

Breathing slowly and easily also helps to relax your muscles, which makes stretching easier and more beneficial. This will ensure that your stretching is safe, and that you gain the greatest possible benefits.

Stretch ONLY to the Point of Tension

Stretching is NOT an activity that was meant to be painful; it should be pleasurable, relaxing and very beneficial. Although many people believe that to get the most from their stretching they need to be in constant pain. This is one of the greatest mistakes you can make when stretching. Let me explain why.

When the muscles and tendons are stretched to the point of pain, the body employs a defense mechanism called the 'stretch reflex'. This is the body's safety measure to prevent serious damage occurring to the muscles and tendons. The 'stretch reflex' protects the muscles and tendons by contracting them, thereby preventing them from being stretched.

So to avoid the 'stretch reflex', avoid pain. Never push yourself beyond what is comfortable. Only stretch to the point where you can feel tension in your muscles. This way, you'll avoid injury and get the maximum benefits from your stretching.

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Stretching Tips are brought to you by Brad Walker. Brad is a leading stretching and sports injury consultant with over 15 years experience in the health and fitness industry. Each tip is pulled directly from Brad's best seller, The Stretching Handbook. For more information, visit www.TheStretchingHandbook.com
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