

Stretch Your Way to Better Health

Stretching is one of the simplest forms of physical activity. It can be the perfect antidote for long periods of inactivity or sitting. It's also one of the cornerstones – along with strength and aerobic training – of a complete workout routine. Remember, it's important to talk with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

The Advantages of Flexibility

Don't underestimate the benefits of stretching. Regularly extending your muscles throughout the day, or before a workout, can help:

- Reduce muscle tension and stress
- Improve circulation to your muscles
- Decrease risk of injury from exercising
- Promote relaxation
- Improve posture
- Help you feel better overall

How Stretching Can Help Prevent Injuries

While injuries can occur at any time, they're more likely to happen if muscles are tired or tight. Working on your flexibility can help keep your muscles and tendons in good working order. Through stretching, you can increase your range of movement, helping you avoid injuries. It also may ease the soreness from an injury and help you recover faster.

Take a Stretch Break

If you sit all day at a desk, you may be putting excess pressure on your back, neck and shoulders. By the end of the day, this can leave you feeling sore and tired. To help relieve muscle stress, take several "breathers" to stretch during the day. One-minute breaks every 20 minutes or so can help relieve tension and loosen stiff muscles. During this time, stretch your arms, shoulders, neck and back muscles.

Warm Up and Cool Down

Flexibility training is important to include in your daily workout routine as well. Before strength and aerobic training, do 10 to 12 minutes of warm-up that includes flexibility exercises. When stretching, hold your positions for a minimum of 10 to 30 seconds for each muscle group. Be careful not to bounce. After your workout, stretch to lower your heart rate and prevent soreness. This movement also can help you "wind down" and relax.

Learn more about your health!



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