Whoever you are, whatever you do, stretching needs to be a fundamental part of your everyday life.

Staying Limber For Life

Loosen Up

Why We Gotta Stretch

Benefits Plan...

6 Great Reasons To Stretch

1. Stretching will make you stand taller.
   Stretching helps prevent age-related height loss. In addition, stretching can help maintain proper joint alignment, leading to a more erect posture at any age.

2. Stretching will make you feel better.
   Stretching is an excellent way to relax and reduce stress. Many people stretch with intensity, holding extreme, overextended positions. But proper stretching at a lower intensity can be a therapeutic way to relax and naturally vent anxiety.

3. Stretching decreases the chance and/or severity of injury.
   Stretching makes our tissues more elastic and less likely to tear or strain. It's not the cure-all to injury, but it is one of the most important injury prevention measures you can take.

4. Stretching helps relieve age-related muscle stiffness.
   As we age, muscle stiffness makes it more difficult to perform routine daily tasks. Regular stretching can combat age-related stiffness by helping to keep our muscles and other tissues elastic.

5. Stretching focuses the mind.
   By spending time stretching before a workout or competition, we can prepare mentally for upcoming physical activity. This allows us to focus on the task ahead and commit ourselves to a specific goal, be it competitive or personal.

6. Stretching could save your life.
   It's true, stretching prepares the body for the increased demands of physical activity by elevating the heart rate and increasing blood flow. This can prevent a stroke or heart attack caused by an immediate strain on the heart and circulatory system.

“Whether you're just beginning an exercise program or continuing with an existing one, stretching should be an essential part of your daily routine.”

For More Information

American College of Sports Medicine
www.acsm.org

National Strength and Conditioning Association
www.humankinetics.com

A PUBLICATION OF THE
Wellness Councils of America
9802 Nicholas Street, Suite 315
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The information contained in this brochure has been carefully reviewed for accuracy. It is not intended to replace the advice of your physician or health care provider.

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Hot Zone

Preventing Low Back Pain

Millions of Americans are plagued by low back pain. Whether occurring as mild aches and pains or severe, immobilizing spasms, it is one of the leading overuse injuries in the workforce. And, while we may not be able to eliminate this strain, with the right stretching and strengthening exercises, we can successfully prevent and alleviate low back pain. Here’s what you can do. (Note: be sure to check out the DOs and DON’Ts of stretching before performing these exercises and always remember to breathe naturally).

Stretching To Prevent Low Back Pain

Pelvic Tilt (Stretching Abdominal Muscles)

Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and arms at your sides. Flatten the small of your back against the floor and hold. Your hips will tilt upward.

Double Knee to Chest (Stretches Hip, Buttocks, Lower Back Muscles)

Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and arms at your sides. Raise both knees, one at a time, to your chest and hold with your hands. Lower your legs, one at a time, to the floor and rest briefly.

Trunk Flex (Stretching Back, Abdominal, and Leg Muscles)

On your hands and knees, rack in your chin and arch your back. Slowly sit back on your heels, letting your shoulders drop toward the floor. Hold.

Strengthening To Prevent Low Back Pain

Cat and Camel (Stretches Back and Abdominal Muscles)

On your hands and knees, tuck in your chin and arch your back. Slowly sit back on your heels, letting your arms straight. Hold.

Partial Sit-Up (Stretches Abdominal Muscles)

Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and arms crossed over your chest. Keeping your middle and lower back flat on the floor, raise your head and shoulders off the floor, and hold.

Core Stretching Routine

Five For Flexibility

It only takes about 10 minutes and a handful of stretches to get your muscles and joints limber and ready to work. Here’s a core stretching routine you can perform that will focus on all the major muscle groups.

1. HAMSTRINGS. Sit on the floor with your upper body erect and both legs straight out in front of you. Slowly reach for your toes with both hands, leaning forward until you feel a slight discomfort.

2. THIGHS. Stand with one hand on a wall for support. Bending your knee, grab your foot with your hand and pull your foot up until you feel a slight discomfort in your thigh or your heel touches your buttocks.

3. LOWER BACK. Get on your hands and knees, with your arms straight and your shoulders directly over your hands. While keeping your hands in place, sit back onto your heels, feeling a stretch in your back.

4. HIPS. Lie flat on your back with your legs straight. Raise one knee toward your chest. Place both hands below the knee and continue to pull your knee to your chest.

5. SHOULDERS AND CHEST. Standing, place both arms behind your back. Interlock your fingers with palms facing each other. Keeping your arms straight, slowly raise your arms.

If you have doubts or questions about whether any of the above stretches are right for you, consult a qualified physical therapist, certified athletic or personal trainer, or medical professional.

Important Reminders

Don’t stretch cold—Starting a workout with intense stretching can be dangerous. Before you stretch, do a couple minutes of light movement—a two-minute walk will work.

Don’t sweat it—Young people are generally more flexible than older people, and women are generally more flexible than men. Know your limits, and set realistic expectations.

Sources: National Strength and Conditioning Association, and the American College of Sports Medicine

Single Leg Extension (Stretches Hip and Buttock Muscles, and Stretches Abdominal and Leg Muscles)

Lie on your stomach with your arms folded under your chin. Slowly lift one leg—not too high—without bending it, while keeping your pelvis flat on the floor. Slowly lower your leg and repeat with the other leg.

Take Action

2 Great Ways To Stretch And Have Fun

Thai Chi

Thai Chi is a Chinese form of exercise suitable for people of all ages. Students learn a series of graceful, flowing movements that look a bit like karate in slow motion. Thai Chi teaches balance, coordination, body awareness, deep breathing, concentration, and greatly helps to improve flexibility.

Thai Chi is taught in many fitness facilities and also offered through private instructors.

Yoga

Yoga is a great way to increase strength, muscle tone, and yes, flexibility. Yoga means “to yoke” and, as a discipline, the technique strives to unite mind, body, and spirit. Yoga is an excellent way to relax and, at the same time, improve your flexibility.

The best way to get started is to find a class that’s near your home and has reasonable prices. Also, don’t be afraid to ask if you can observe for the first time in order to find out if Yoga is right for you.

Stretching Dos & Don’ts

DO…

✓ Stretch at least 3 days per week
✓ Stretch only to the point of mild discomfort
✓ Hold each stretch for 10 to 30 seconds
✓ Repeat each stretch 3 to 5 times

DON’T…

✓ Bounce; this tightens your muscles
✓ Hold painful positions; this can tear your muscles
✓ Exercise an injured area without consulting a medical professional
✓ Hold your breath; this starves your muscles of oxygen

Source: The Modern Book of Stretching by Anne Kent Rush