

What Flexibility Resources Are Best For You?

- Do you currently follow a consistent stretching routine?
- If so, what exercises are you doing?
- If not, do you have access to credible information regarding appropriate stretches?
- Have you ever used tools such as exer-tubing, stretch bands, balance balls, or other equipment to support your efforts?
- Could stretching aids of some type enhance your effectiveness?
- Are you aware of specific areas where a lack of flexibility could be contributing to stiffness, lack of mobility, postural deviations, or pain?



Flexibility

Flexibility is one of the most frequently forgotten, yet most beneficial components of a well rounded exercise program. Stretching helps maintain muscular balance, improves posture, coordination and circulation, prevents injury, and reduces tension. Done properly, it increases the range of motion about a joint, enhancing mobility and ease of movement during daily activities as well as athletic endeavors.

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Understanding the FITT Principle

The American College of Sports Medicine recommends following the **FITT** principle to maintain a healthy level of flexibility:

Frequency

Exercise 5 to 7 days each week.

Unlike some other forms of exercise, it is okay to stretch out on a daily basis. In fact, it is recommended and may even be done multiple times during the same day. Stretching can be done anytime; such as when you feel “stiff”, need to relieve tension, or have been sitting for a prolonged period.



Two ideal times to stretch are; during the warm-up phase of a workout, to help prevent injury, and during the cool down phase of a workout, to help prevent soreness. Regardless of timing, flexibility routines are best performed in a “state of relaxation” and preferably when the muscles being stretched are “warm” from activity.

Intensity

Stretch to the point of controlled tension.

To improve flexibility, the muscles and tendons about a particular joint must be challenged to elongate beyond their normal movement patterns. All stretches should be done in a slow and controlled manner, holding each stretch just beyond the point of mild tension (not pain). Avoid bouncing movements, and exhale during the effort for maximum benefit.

Time

Hold each stretch 10 to 20 seconds or longer.



Pausing briefly after a specific stretching exercise, relaxing, and then repeating the same exercise at slightly higher intensity can improve results.

Type

A variety of total body stretching exercises targeting the major muscle groups.

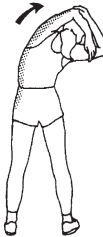
The goal of a consistent stretching routine should be to improve overall flexibility by completing 8 to 10 exercises that involve the upper and lower body, trunk, and extremities. Focus especially on “tight” areas, or those that could lead to muscular imbalances. If stretching as part of the warm up for a specific event, choose stretches that mimic the impending activity and involve body parts that will be recruited for use.



Consult a reliable source to determine the most appropriate stretches for your flexibility program. Many exercises which were once thought to be safe are now contraindicated for most populations.



1 arms



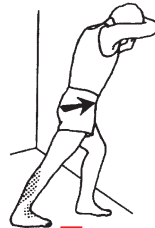
2 arms and side



3 hamstrings



4 hamstrings



5 calves



6 inner thighs



7 quadriceps