

INSPIRED

To Make Healthy Choices

Flexibility will improve your health.

Stretching has a calming effect.

Flexibility improves your balance reducing your risk of falls.

Check out youtube.com for numerous routine ideas.

Flexibility can keep your body healthier and it's easy to fit it into your daily schedule as long as you are intentional about it. Consider stretching for a few minutes before you get out of bed or after you shower, using gentle head-to-toe stretches. **Stretching can be done anytime and anywhere**, at home or at work, even while waiting at a red light.

Regular stretching has a lot of positive impacts on the body and these are just a few of them:

- Increases flexibility, which makes daily tasks easier
- Improves range of motion of your joints, which helps keep you mobile
- Improves circulation
- Promotes better posture
- Helps relieve stress by relaxing tense muscles and decreases muscle stiffness
- Helps prevent injury, especially if your muscles or joints are tight

Stretching will also decrease the risk of low back pain. Flexibility in the hamstrings, hip flexors and muscles attached to the pelvis relieves stress on the lumbar spine which in turn reduces the risk of low back pain.

When you stretch:

- **Target major muscle groups** focusing on your calves, thighs, hips, lower back, neck and shoulders. Also stretch muscles and joints that you routinely use at work or play.
- **Warm up first.** Stretching muscles when they're cold increases your risk of injury, including pulled muscles. Warm up by walking while gently pumping your arms, or do a favorite exercise at low intensity for five minutes. If you only have time to stretch once, do it after you exercise, when your muscles are warm and when you do stretch, start slowly.
- **Hold each stretch for at least 20 seconds.** It takes time to lengthen tissues safely. Hold your stretches up to 60 seconds for a really tight muscle or problem area. Then repeat the stretch on the other side. For most muscle groups, a single stretch is usually sufficient.

- **Don't bounce.** Bouncing gets your muscles out of the stretch position and doesn't allow them to relax.
- **Avoid "locking" your joints.** Straighten your arms and legs when you stretch them, but don't hold them tightly in a straight position. Your joints should always be slightly bent while stretching.
- **Focus on a pain-free stretch.** Expect to feel tension while you're stretching. If it hurts, you've gone too far.
- **Relax and breathe freely.** Don't hold your breath while you're stretching.

If you have a chronic condition or an injury, you may need to alter your approach. For example, if you have a strained muscle, stretching it as you usually do may cause further harm. **Talk with your doctor or a physical therapist** about the best way for you to stretch.

The connective tissue within ligaments and tendons becomes more rigid and brittle with age, which tends to restrict the range of motion. **It's very important to modify, adapt and adjust the stretch to suit your particular needs.** Use padding under your knees for example, or try the same stretch sitting down, lying down, or standing up if it's more comfortable for you. If you have a problem area, such as tightness in the back of your leg, you may want to stretch every day or even twice a day.

Most activities, cardio and/or strength-training, gardening, golfing or playing tennis **cause your muscles to tighten.** That's why it's important to **stretch regularly to keep your body functioning well.**

For more information:
FLEXIBILITY
www.guideinc.org

