[IMAGE]

Are You Stretching the Wrong Way? Try the Right Way

By Perry Nickelston, DC, FMS, SFMA

How would you like to increase coordination, reduce muscle tension, increase range of motion, prevent future injury, improve posture, develop body awareness, and enhance proper movement patterns? The good news is you can, by incorporating active isolated stretching (AIS) techniques and principles into your exercise / wellness routine.

Ninety percent of people who stretch usually do so ineffectively, performing the same old-style stretching exercises that most athletes, coaches, therapists and fitness magazines have recommended for years. These programs often consist of holding the same boring positions to stretch the groin, hamstrings, hip flexors and low back at the same intensity and for the same duration, without regard for the uniqueness of each individual. People are likely to be worse off than they would have been if they hadn’t stretched at all!

Why? When stretched for too long, muscles will inherently tighten up as a self-protective mechanism. They are protecting themselves from potential tearing and injury. Unless you learn how to bypass this protective mechanism, your body will never allow an increase in flexibility to occur.

girl stretching - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark AIS is based on the principle of *reciprocal inhibition*, which states that when you contract one muscle, an opposing muscle will relax. When this occurs we have an opportunity for a more effective stretch of the relaxed muscle. Hold each stretch for a maximum of 2 seconds to prevent the "stretch reflex" from occurring. This reflex occurs when a muscle is stretched for too long and too hard, and the nervous system actually tightens up that muscle in anticipation of an injury. The muscle becomes tighter as a rebound effect. Instead of gaining flexibility, you actually lose it.

AIS works muscles, joints, ligaments and soft tissue. There is no need for a partner, thus making it easy to actively stretch difficult-to-reach muscles. Just a few sessions of AIS can equal weeks of old-school stretch-and-hold programs. The basic protocol for AIS consists of the following:

- 10 repetitions per stretch
- Hold each stretch for 1-2 seconds
- Assist at end range into movement with approximately 2 pounds of additional pressure

- Exhale into each movement

AIS takes just 5 minutes at a stretch (no pun intended) and can make you feel incredible. It takes a little practice, but the more you stick with it, the better you will get. You will become empowered to take back control of your life from pain. Your doctor of chiropractic can tell you more about active isolated stretching and recommend a comprehensive stretching and exercise program suitable to your health needs.

Perry Nickelston, DC, is clinical director of the Pain Laser Center in Ramsey, N.J., where he focuses on performance enhancement, corrective exercise and metabolic fitness nutrition To learn more about Dr. Nickelston, visit www.painlasercenter.com/Our_Practice.html.

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