

[IMAGE]

Flexibility and Your Health

By Jeffrey Tucker, DC, DACRB

A sound fitness program must include a balance of exercises. I like to see people perform a mix of range of motion movements, flexibility, strength and endurance. These are the pillars of a healthy body. Flexibility work is essential. Each of us needs to remain very flexible especially as we age. It's not just that "It feels so good." Without proper flexibility, range of motion, strength and endurance of the human body, anti-aging success is minimized. If you get an injury and heal with poor flexibility, your chance of re-injury may be increased. No matter what our age we should be working to improve our movement skills to maximize performance and to decrease the chance of injury.

Flexibility is the elongation of soft tissues through joint motion. As a kid it was easy to pursue the "splits", touching fingers to the toes, and higher level flexibility challenges. As adults we lose that feeling of fluid, coordinated, and agile movement. Trying to regain flexibility leads to a new appreciation for what we once had.

A solid lower body flexibility program might do wonders for your low back ache and pain. A good flexibility program to your thoracic spine could help relieve neck and shoulder pain. Couple flexibility work with some safe, perfect form weight training and you'll feel better.

Flexibility - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Stretching is like a pharmaceutical compound that affects the whole body. Stretching has separate effects from exercise and can be a precursor to a good night's sleep. Stretching and sleep have the potential to alter our brain health and mental function. Stretching is a viable strategy for enhancing cognitive abilities, protecting the brain from damage and counteracting the effects of aging. Stretching increases flexibility.

Stretching and actively warming up have just gone together for decades. It's simply what's been done before walking, running, biking, and sports play. Dynamically warming up is what prevents injury, by slowly increasing your blood flow and giving your muscles a chance to prepare for the upcoming activity. To this end, I suggest a thorough dynamic warmup, as well as conditioning for your particular sport. If you need to increase your flexibility so it's in the normal range (touching your toes without bending your knees,

for instance), do your stretching when your muscles are already warm. I tell my clients to do your flexibility maneuvers at the brink of the pain. Don't move too far into the pain, but lightly "touch" it.

Yoga has gained popularity because it eases stress, lowers blood pressure, slows heart rates, and increases flexibility. There's nothing mystical about it. Loosening your muscles will make them more adaptable, so you may be less likely to injure yourself playing sports. I know some of the poses may look ridiculous, but yoga can reach and work muscles that are ignored during routine sports and daily life.

Why do people stretch?

- Overall flexibility
- Muscle lengthening - Joint mobility
- Release tension
- Prevent delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS)
- Injury prevention
- Performance preparation

Don't wait to get started with flexibility to elongate, and increase your muscle length. Be consistent for at least 3 weeks for "plastic" changes to occur.

Examples of flexibility maneuvers:

flexibility - Copyright â *Instructions:*

Stock Photo / Register Lay supine with one end of a long loop around the foot and secure the other end in your hands. Pull your leg upward, stretching your hamstrings. Hold and slowly return. Hold 10-15 seconds and slowly return. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

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flexibility - Copyright â *Instructions:*

Stock Photo / Register Kneel on floor with arms outstretched and hands on ball or the floor. Lean forward while pushing the ball forward. Lower trunk towards floor, stretching the upper back. Hold 10-15 seconds and slowly return. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

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Instructions:

Stand with the leg you are stretching behind the other one. Place your arm overhead and lean away from the side you are stretching. Hold and slowly return. Don't hold your breath. Hold 10-15 seconds and slowly return. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

Instructions:

Sit in a sturdy chair. Place the ankle of the leg you want to stretch over the flexibility - opposite knee in a "figure 4" position. Lean forward until you feel a stretch Copyright © Stock in your buttock. Hold 10-15 seconds and slowly return. Repeat 3 to 5 Photo / Register times. Mark

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