

# PRINCIPLES OF STRETCHING

## WHO SHOULD STRETCH

- Most everyone - regardless of age or flexibility

## WHY STRETCH

- Reduce muscle tension and stress
- Improve coordination and body awareness
- Increase flexibility and range of motion
- Reduce the risk of strain from unexpected over-stretch
- Preparation for other physical activities
- Improve circulation

## TYPES OF STRETCHING

- *Static Stretching* - holding a comfortable lengthened position for 15-30 seconds. As the stretch feeling diminishes, the stretch is increased.
- *Active Stretching* - tightening (contracting) muscles that facilitate a stretch. For example, the calf muscles may be stretched by actively tightening the muscles in the front of the leg.
- *Ballistic Stretching* - rapid bouncing to force the target muscle to elongate. Unfortunately, this type of stretch may cause the muscle to reflexively shorten rather than lengthen due to muscle spasm and injury. Any increases in length may be the result of muscle tearing.
- *Partner Stretching* - the partner moves the body part to a position of light stretch, at which time the person being stretched provides a mild resistance for 8-10 seconds. Upon relaxation, the stretch is increased. If performed carelessly, this technique can cause muscle injury. When performed correctly, tissue elongation is cumulative and it is very effective.

## HOW TO STRETCH

**Warming Up** - Always warm up before stretching. In order to increase blood flow to the muscles, walk at a brisk pace or ride a stationary bicycle at a low resistance for a few minutes prior to commencing. Movement of the upper extremities is important during these activities to warm up the upper body.

**How Long / How Much** - Stretches should be held for at least 10 seconds per muscle; although 30 seconds to 2 minutes is preferred. Do not strain. The stretch should always be comfortable. Return to neutral slowly. Never change position quickly after a stretch is completed, or muscle spasm may occur. Some post-stretch soreness is normal, but it should not limit your activities. An average stretch routine should require approximately 15 minutes.

**Breathing** - Do not hold your breath while stretching. Abdominal breathing is best. Exhale as you move into the stretch and continue relaxed, rhythmic breathing for the duration of the stretch.

**Frequency** - Ideally, you should stretch before and after exercises; at least once per day. When possible, attempt to integrate stretching into your daily routine.

**Repetitions** - Shorter stretches [30 seconds or less] should be repeated 2-3 times. Longer stretches [1-2 minutes] can be performed once.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Stretching by Bob Anderson. Shelter Publications, Inc. – about \$9.95 [Great illustrations and routines for all activities]



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