

fingertips for the client

BY DIANE M. MARTY

THE TRUTH ABOUT STRETCHING

The results are amazing: a long, lean body, the release of cramps, the stance and strength of a true athlete. Even with these benefits, stretching remains a much neglected activity.

Ann and Chris Frederick, directors of the Stretch to Win Center and the Stretch to Win Institute in Tempe, Arizona, have suggestions to make a few minutes of stretching an effective, efficient, and enjoyable part of your day.

So, what stretches are right for you?

Find out by downloading a Personal Flexibility Assessment (PFA) at StretchtoWin.com. A series of self tests will lead you to a customized program. After all, shouldn't your stretching routine be as unique as you?

- Prevent overtraining or overuse injuries. Balance your day-to-day repetitive motions with stretches that work those muscles in opposite directions.

Weight lifters who also perform hip extensions prevent tight hips by releasing the tension that causes glute weakness, which could strain the hamstrings.

- Remember that pre- and post-exercise stretches have distinct characteristics. Before exercising, your concentration should be on faster movements starting with the large muscle groups. Post-exercise or before sleep, static stretches aid recovery.
- Stretching should never hurt—especially in the joints. Skip that stretch if you become more than uncomfortable. You should only feel mild tension at the position's deepest point.



- Test stretches to their fullest arcs or amplitudes. Likely you're less flexible in one direction. Start and end every stretch with the tighter side for a two-to-one ratio.
- Concentrate on elongating muscles by extending both ends in opposite directions.
- Inactive lifestyles guarantee stiffness, soreness, and body asymmetries. While sitting at a computer, stretching the wrists thwarts ergonomic impacts. Try simple stretches done during television time to save your back—or another part of your anatomy.
- The most common type of stretching, the static variety, involves placing a muscle or muscle group in a lengthened position, then maintaining it for a few seconds up to several minutes.

The pendulum-like movements of dynamic stretching become progressively deeper. Activity and sport specific, these warm-up positions aid speed and power. An example: competitive swimmers swinging their arms before diving in the water.

Rhythmic bouncing, bobbing, and kicking characterize ballistic stretching. Dancers, gymnasts, and martial artists all stretch ballistically. People outside these physical realms should avoid this type of stretch, as experts believe the motion causes injuries.

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