

Basic Stretching Guidelines

To help the body maintain the ability to perform normal activity there must be a proper amount of flexibility in the joints and muscles. Disease, trauma, or loss of motion in a joint can eventually cause shortening of the muscles, tendons, and joint capsule. For these reasons, stretching is an important part of a fitness program. Proper stretching prior to beginning your program can also help reduce injury and prepare your muscles for the workout.

Stretching can be done before and after exercise or activity. Stretching is best done slowly. Do not bounce during a stretch. When stretching:

1. First take the muscle to a gentle pull.
2. Hold the stretch for a short while (approximately 15-30 seconds). You may hold the stretch longer if desired.
3. When the feeling of tension decreases the stretch can be taken further.
4. Rest between stretches. Never try to gain too much range in one session and never stretch to the point of pain. It may take several weeks to see results, so be patient.
5. Relax and breathe regular during stretches.

Useful Hints:

1. Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
2. When stretching muscles which cross two joints, such as the hamstrings, which cross the knee and ankle, first stretch over each joint separately, then stretch both joints together.
3. Gentle, longer stretches are generally more effective.
4. Stretch the joints farthest away from the trunk first.
5. Applying heat to the joints and muscles prior to stretching can help enhance the stretch.
6. Massage and relaxation techniques may enhance stretching.

There are specialized techniques for stretching which your health professional may teach you.

DO NOT STRETCH IF:

1. The joint has a bony block.
2. A fracture is present.
3. The muscle or joint is inflamed (the presence of heat or swelling).
4. The joint is excessively lax and the muscle is helping to keep the joint stable. Check with your health professional or personal trainer if you have questions.