

EXERCISING FOR FLEXIBILITY

STRETCH FOR FITNESS AND FLEXIBILITY

Along with regular aerobic exercise and strength training, it's important to include stretching exercises too. Combine all three types of exercise and you're building a body that's more likely to be fitter, stronger and more supple — a healthy and useful body to have.

WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT FLEXIBILITY?

It improves your range of movement so that you can bend, stretch, reach and twist more easily. This is especially important for anyone with a sedentary job — sitting all day limits the range of movements we do. Stretching also helps to improve your balance, counteracts muscle tension and stiffness and may help to relieve stress.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I STRETCH?

To increase or maintain flexibility and reduce muscle tension, Sports Medicine Australia's injury prevention program Smartplay suggests a 15–20 minute stretching session two to three times a week.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO STRETCH?

Sometimes you'll see people making bouncing movements as they stretch. This is called ballistic stretching but fitness experts suggest avoiding bouncing as it may cause injury. A better way is static stretching — this means you slowly stretch a muscle until you feel resistance, but not pain. Remember that if you feel any pain, stop.

WILL STRETCHING BEFORE OR AFTER EXERCISE PREVENT INJURY OR SORENESS?

Not necessarily. Although stretching before and after a workout is often recommended to prevent injury, Australian research suggests that it doesn't significantly reduce injury. However, Smartplay suggest you should still include stretching as part of your cool down after exercise. A five to ten minute stretching session emphasising the major groups of muscles you have just used can help your body get rid of muscle waste products and help reduce soreness and stiffness.

TIPS FOR STRETCHING FROM SMARTPLAY INCLUDE:

- Hold each stretch for 10 to 20 seconds without bouncing
- Repeat each stretch 2 to 3 times
- Stretch gently and slowly and keep breathing as you stretch
- Stretch to the point of tension — but not to the point of pain.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Bupa health information
www.bupa.com.au/health

Smartplay
www.smartplay.com.au

Sources:

Harvard Health Letter. (www.health.harvard.edu)

Jamtvedt G Herbert RD Flottorp S et al. A pragmatic randomised trial of stretching before and after physical activity to prevent injury and soreness. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. 2010; 44:1002-1009.

Smartplay. (www.smasa.asn.au/smartplay/)

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