

## Avoid Injuries With Proper Technique

Stretching is not complicated. Then again, it is not as simple as leaning one way and reaching another. If you do a stretching maneuver wrong, you won't get all of its benefits or, worse, you could injure yourself. So learn the right way to lean and reach.

Start by knowing when to do it. Remember – stretching is a form of exercise all to itself. So for its own sake, devote at least three times a week to only stretching. If you have a particularly tense or tight part of the body, stretch it every day or even twice a day.

On top of that, stretch along with your daily walk, your tennis match, or your dancing session. Stretching complements every fitness activity under the sun. It is especially important if you are active in physical activities like strength training or cardio. These exercises naturally tighten up your muscles. Stretching counters that by lengthening them.

Whatever activity you are involved in; loosen up lightly before you do it. Then stretch thoroughly afterward. You can skip the first stretch if you are short on time, but make sure to do the end session – before your muscles cool down and tighten up.

### **Take the crucial first step – warm up**

You would not jump into the shower right after turning on the water. The cold water would shock your system. Instead, you wait for the water to warm up. It is the same with stretching. Don't dive right in when your muscles are still cold. Spend several minutes warming them up with one of these activities:

- Jumping jacks
- A ride on a real or stationary bike
- Walking while pumping your arms
- Running in place
- Practicing the stretches you plan to do
- Your favorite exercise or activity at a slow pace

Any one of these can get your heart rate up, loosen your muscles and joints, and prepare you for an injury-free workout.

### **Work slowly and gently for maximum gain**

It is best to stretch all your major muscle groups any time you do a stretching routine. In other words, loosen all the muscles you usually use in your day – your legs, back, neck, and other upper body muscles.

If you are in a rush, however, loosen only the muscles you need at the moment. Work on your legs before you jog, for instance, or stretch your shoulders before golfing. Afterwards, make sure to do a complete stretch. For all your muscles, follow these easy stretching guidelines.

- Reach as far as you can. Don't feel you have to touch your toes or bend over backward. For any stretch, reach as far as you can until you feel a slight tension in your muscle. If you feel pain or a burning sensation, on the other hand, you have gone too deep. Ease back until the pain goes away.
- Hold it for at least 30 seconds. Do each stretch for this long, and you will only need to do it once. A whole minute may be in order if your muscle is really tight. Time yourself with a stopwatch at first to get the feel of how long this is. If you really enjoy stretching and feel you need it, repeat each stretch as many as three to five minutes.
- Feel at ease and breathe. This session is not a workout for your lungs, so breathe as you normally would. You are not supposed to clench your muscles, either. Relax every muscle except the ones you are stretching at the moment.
- Do not bounce. No matter what your gym teacher taught you in high school, do not bounce when you stretch. You risk injury by doing it, and it may even make you less flexible.

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## About the Author

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