

+READY? SET. STRETCH!

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Stretching is one of the easiest ways to increase your overall health and eliminate some of those persistent aches and pains you deal with on a daily basis. Some people are naturally more flexible than others and some are tight due to injuries, a lack of physical activity or simply not drinking enough water (dehydration). But the good news is anyone can gain flexibility and enjoy the numerous benefits of stretching. It just takes an investment of time and patience. Stretching is free, you can do it anytime, anywhere with no equipment necessary and it works well with multi-tasking! This means you can stretch while sitting at your desk, while reading or watching TV. It only requires 10-15 minutes per day and the benefits are numerous.

Benefits of Stretching. There are numerous positive benefits to stretching, yet this simple activity remains one of the most neglected aspects of health and fitness.

- **Stretching increases flexibility and enhances function.** Flexibility is defined as your range of motion within each joint. Having more flexibility makes your body more efficient and your everyday life easier and less painful. Simple tasks such as tying your shoes, lifting packages or chasing after the kids become easier and less tiring.
- **Stretching can prevent injury.** Increased range of motion helps you to maintain your balance, thus preventing falls and the associated injuries. This is especially important as we age.
- **Stretching can reduce or eliminate daily aches and pains.** Body aches and pains are often caused by muscle imbalances. Our muscles are designed to work together in harmony and when one gets out of balance it can cause unnecessary stresses throughout the body which may lead to daily pain. Satan uses pain to distract us, so daily stretching can remove one of Satan's tools to control us!
- **Stretching can relieve mental and physical stress.** Stretching relaxes the tense muscles that often accompany stress. When stressed, the body goes through a series of complex reactions, one being a tightening of the muscular system. When stress persists, the muscles may remain in a state of contraction without you even realizing it. This can cause muscle fatigue and soreness which can be reduced through proper stretching.

Getting started:

It's best to warm the body up prior to any stretching. Simply walk or perform a light jog for 3-5 minutes. This gets the blood flowing to the muscles which prepares them to be stretched.

Pain & Stretching...the stretch reflex:

To prevent us from stretching the muscle too far and tearing it, God threw in a defense mechanism called the stretch reflex. When the muscle is being over-stretched, a pain signal is sent to the brain and the muscle will start to tighten rather than lengthen. It's protecting itself! So pain is the indicator that you're no longer stretching the muscle, but working against it as it tightens up to protect itself.

Step 1:

Position your body as instructed until you first feel the tension in the muscle being stretched. Hold the stretch (pain-free) until the muscle relaxes and the tension starts to go away. This is your indicator that you can now increase the stretch. Always maintain a normal breathing pattern while stretching. Never hold your breath.

Step 2:

Increase the stretch to the point where comfortable tension is felt and again hold until the tension goes away.

Step 3:

Repeat this procedure 3-4 times or for up to 2-3 minutes for each stretch.