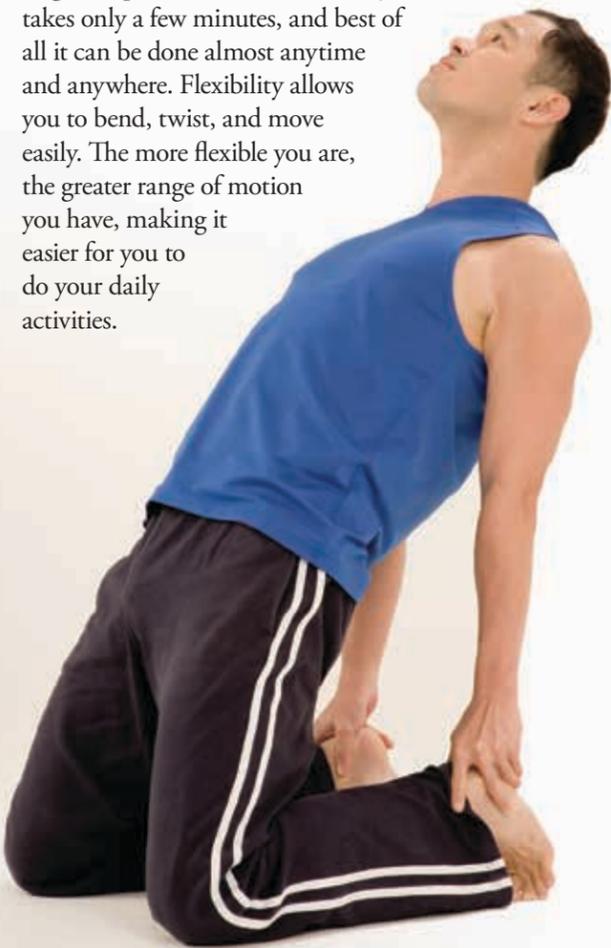


Don't Forget Flexibility...

Typical physical fitness programs include cardiovascular endurance and strength training. However, most people don't realize flexibility is equally important. Cardiovascular endurance burns fat and strength training helps us to build strength. But what does flexibility do? It doesn't make us faster or stronger, and maybe that's why it's often the most forgotten part of fitness. Yet it's easy, takes only a few minutes, and best of all it can be done almost anytime and anywhere. Flexibility allows you to bend, twist, and move easily. The more flexible you are, the greater range of motion you have, making it easier for you to do your daily activities.



Prepares the body for exercise — Stretching loosens up the muscles and prepares your body for exercise.

Helps to reduce low-back pain — Flexibility in the hamstrings and pelvic muscles help relieve stress on the spine.

Still not convinced stretching can help you? Have a look at the checklist shown below. All of these concerns can be helped through a stretching program. So, if you would like to achieve any of the goals in this list, stretching may just be the answer for you:

- I want to manage my stress better.
- I want to have a special relaxation time.
- I want my daily activities to be easier.
- I want to feel less stiff after sitting at work all day.
- I want to start my day off feeling healthy with a morning stretch.
- I want to end my day feeling healthy.
- I want to be more stable while walking.
- I want to improve my athletic performance.
- I want to reduce my muscle soreness after exercise.
- I want to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Why Should You Stretch?

There are many reasons why you should stretch about why you should add stretching to your daily activity.

Decreases muscle stiffness—Stretched muscles are less tense and stiff because they are more relaxed.

Increases range of motion—This can slow the degeneration of joints, allow you greater freedom of movement, and help you perform your daily tasks easier.

Helps to reduce pain in muscles after activity—Lengthening muscles will minimize your aches and pains. Exercise and activity make the muscles contract, and stretching lengthens them by increasing their range of movement and contraction potential.

Helps to improve posture—Stretching the muscles in better alignment and will help you stand up straighter. Added bonus: standing up straight makes you look thinner!

Helps you manage stress—Stretched muscles are more relaxed and carry less tension.

Improves functional activities—Flexible joints require less energy to move through a wide range of motion, and help increase body awareness, balance, and coordination.

Why Stretch?

Stretching & Flexibility



Stretching is a key component to better health. Learn how to decrease muscle stiffness, reduce pain, manage stress, and improve daily life.

A PUBLICATION OF



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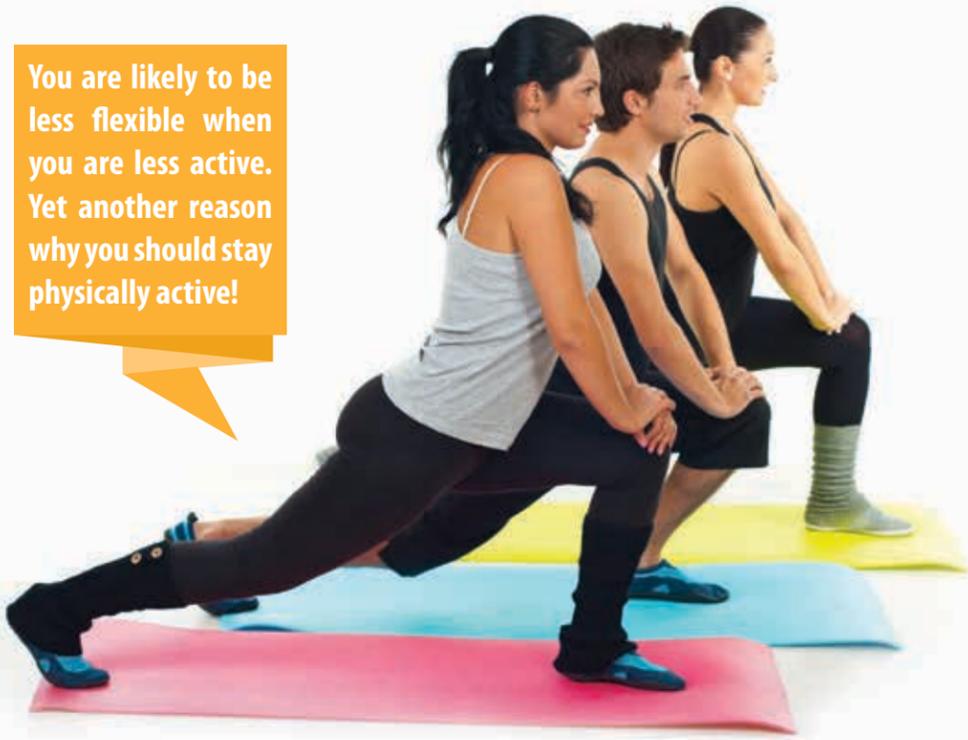
The information contained in this brochure has been carefully reviewed for accuracy. It is not intended to replace the advice of your physician or health care provider.



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You are likely to be less flexible when you are less active. Yet another reason why you should stay physically active!



Some Simple Guidelines... For Effective Stretching

Your ability to accomplish simple daily tasks, such as reaching down and picking up something on the floor, or reaching out to grasp your driving wheel, or reaching up to take down a box from a top shelf are all examples of the physical power of stretching and flexibility. To be sure, stretching and flexibility are a big part of your life—you just may not realize it. Unfortunately, if you don't "use it" you will definitely lose it. That's why it's key to keep stretching and flexibility exercises a normal and routine part of your life. Doing so will help you to physically reach further with your body—and ultimately, your health and fitness goals.

Stretching is easy and there are not too many rules associated with it. However, there are a few guidelines that you need to consider in order to get the most out of your stretching time. These include:

Set your own individual goals. Try not to compare your flexibility to others.

Concentrate on the muscles you use most and the ones that are least flexible first. Now, don't neglect other parts of your body, but start with the ones you use the most as these will give you the most improvement and best results over time.

Wear clothing that allows you to move and stretch comfortably.

Make sure you're not stretching to the point of pain. You can tear muscles if you stretch them too far, or too quickly. So, make sure each stretch is done while feeling only a slight or gentle discomfort in the muscle. If your muscles start to hurt, reduce the stretch until it is only a gentle discomfort. Remember, it is better to go

slowly and progress gradually, than to over-extend a stretch and find yourself unable to stretch again for a few days or weeks.

Stretch as often as you like. There is no limit to how much you can stretch or the number of times you are able to stretch each day. As long as you do not overstretch a muscle to the point where you damage it, you can stretch it as often as you like.

Stay physically active. You are likely to be less flexible when you are less active.

When Should You Stretch?

There are many different opinions about when it is best to stretch so here are some general guidelines to remember.

Limit stretching before activity – Stretching is a good idea if you are about to be physically active. However, if you like to stretch before activity, first warm up your muscles by walking or doing another light cardiovascular activity for 3 to 5 minutes. This will help ensure that your muscles are warm and able to be stretched safely.

Stretch after exercise or activity – After activity your joints have been moved through a wide range of movement. Your muscles are warmest at this point and will respond best to stretching. Warm muscles are less stiff and will be able to stretch further.

Find a certain time to stretch – If you are not very active, try to stretch when your muscles are warm, like after a shower or later in the day. Most people are most flexible in the afternoon. The important thing is to stretch at a preferred time every day to keep you motivated and on track.

Keep A Stretching Diary

A stretching diary is an excellent tool to help you keep track of your progress and stay motivated while participating in the four-week plan. Complete a diary page like the one shown here for each week of your four-week plan. After you have finished the four-week plan, take a look at your stretching diary to see what progress you have made.

A Four-Week Stretching Program For A More Flexible You

You will gain the most benefit from a stretching program if you stick to a well-designed program. Here is a four-week stretching plan to help you on your way to becoming more flexible!

As with cardiovascular endurance and strength training, it's important to consider intensity, duration, and frequency when starting a flexibility program. This plan promotes static stretching, since this is the safest and most effective way to stretch for the general population. Your goal is to stretch each muscle group for 30 seconds, 2-3 times a week. If you have the time you can stretch every day. A good stretching program should only take 10 minutes of your day, and may easily become the best 10 minutes of your day!

WEEK 1

Pick two days out of the week to follow these guidelines:

- Warm up – Walk in place or outside for 3-5 minutes;
- Stretch each muscle group to a point of mild discomfort using static stretches;
- Hold each stretch for 5-10 seconds;
- Rest for a few seconds in between each stretch; and
- Repeat each stretch three times.

WEEK 2

Pick two days out of the week to follow these guidelines:

- Warm up – Walk in place or outside for 3-5 minutes;
- Stretch each muscle group to a point of mild discomfort using static stretches;

- Hold each stretch for 10-15 seconds;
- Rest for a few seconds in between each stretch; and
- Repeat each stretch three times.

WEEK 3

Pick three days out of the week to follow these guidelines:

- Warm up – Walk in place or outside for 3-5 minutes;
- Stretch each muscle group to a point of mild discomfort using static stretches;
- Hold each stretch for 20 seconds;
- Rest for a few seconds in between each stretch; and
- Repeat each stretch two times.

WEEK 4

Pick three days out of the week to follow these guidelines:

- Warm up – Walk in place or outside for 3-5 minutes;
- Stretch each muscle group to a point of mild discomfort using static stretches; and
- Hold each stretch for up to 30 seconds.
- No need to repeat the stretch. Holding one long stretch is more effective than several shorter ones.

DAY	Feeling Before Stretching	Stretches	Duration	Repetitions	Feelings After Stretching
SUN	Muscles feel tight, and low back hurts	All stretches from the pictures	20 seconds for each stretch	2 times for each stretch	Relaxed and less tense
MON					
TUE					
WED					
THU					
FRI					
SAT					