

Benefits of Stretching

- Improved muscle balance around joints and increases the fluidity and range of motion of these surrounding tissues
- An effective way to warm up soft tissues up to help prevent injuries such as tears in the ligaments of tendons, muscle strains, bone fractures, and fatigue
- Increased blood flow and increased amounts of much-needed oxygen to all areas of the body
- Improved muscle tone
- Decreased muscle stiffness and cramping
- Lessened back pain and better overall posture
- Improved circulation
- Greater muscle efficiency and ultimately a heighten total body performance
- On another level, stretching directly aids in stress management and mental clarity

How to Stretch

In order for stretching to be efficient, it must be performed properly. Before beginning a stretching routine, the muscles should be properly warmed-up. This can be done with a 5-10 minute, low intensity exercise such a brisk walk, cycling, or stair climbing. Once the muscles are warmed-up, simple start up stretches can begin. Your workout should be immediately followed, within 10 minutes of completion, with a stretching session that focuses on all the major muscle groups that were involved.

- A proper stretch should be done by only one major muscle group at a time and should never cause pain. Stretching to the point of pain can cause damage to your tendons, ligaments, and the muscle being stretched.
- All stretches should be held for at least 30 seconds! This can be accomplished, along with additional stress relief by holding each stretch for 3- 5 count breaths. (5 counts on the inhale, 5 counts on the exhale)
- Stretches should be slow and steady movements, not bouncing/ballistic- Bouncing while stretching can cause muscle tissue damage in the form of tears.
- If you are holding a stretch and you begin to shake, you are going too far and should ease off the stretch a bit.

It only takes an extra ten to fifteen minutes to stretch properly. Finding the time to stretch shouldn't be nearly as difficult as actually creating a healthy habit to execute this exercise on a daily basis. But once you are able to discipline your mind and body into practicing this regimen, you will no doubt feel more energized while simultaneously being less burdened by aches and pains. Of all the exercises we push our bodies into, stretching should be at the top...well, the beginning...of

our list.

You can stretch anytime, anywhere — in your home, at work or when you're traveling. If you have a chronic condition or an injury, however, you may need to alter your approach to stretching. For example, if you have a strained muscle, stretching it like usual may cause further harm. Discuss with your doctor or physical therapist the best way to stretch.



Upper Body Stretches

Neck Stretch - Relax your head to each side, and front and back for 30 seconds each direction. Lift your head to a neutral position between each count; do not roll your neck.

Shoulder Stretch - Take your right hand and, going over your shoulder, place it as far down your back as possible. Place your left hand on your right elbow and push backward. You should feel the stretch in your right shoulder area. Switch arms and repeat.

Upper Arm Stretch - Cross your right arm across your chest toward your left side, keeping your elbow straight. With the inside of your left elbow or your left hand, push your right arm back toward your body. You should feel the stretch in your right upper arm and shoulder. Switch arms and repeat.

Upper Back Stretch - Clasp your hands together in front of your body. Straighten your elbows, keeping your hands clasped and your palms facing outward. Let your shoulders shift forward, and push your hands out away from your body. You should feel a stretch in your upper back area.

Chest Stretch - Clasp your hands together behind your back, with your palms together. Keeping your elbows straight, lift your hands out and up behind you as far as possible. You should be able to feel the stretch in your shoulders and chest. For a deeper stretch, bend over at the waist, with your arms above you and elbows still straight. Let gravity pull your arms as far as possible. Slowly stand up and release your hands.

Abdomen Stretch - Clasp your hands together above your head. Straighten your [arms up](#) as much as possible, and pull your hands away from your body. You may bend back slightly to deepen the stretch. You should feel the stretch in your abdomen area.

Side Stretch - Clasp your hands together over your head with your arms slightly bent. Facing forward, bend to the right at the waist. You should feel the stretch on the right side of your torso. Return to the standing position with your hands above your head, and do the same to the left.

Lower Back Stretch - Start in a seated position, with your legs out in front of you. Bend your right

knee to a 90 degree angle, and place your right foot on the outer side of your left leg so that your right leg is crossed over your left. Your left leg should remain straight. Twist your torso to the right, placing your left elbow on the outside of your right knee. Push your elbow against your knee as leverage to deepen the stretch if possible. You should feel the stretch in your lower back. Release and switch sides.

Lower Body Stretches

Hamstring Stretch - Stand with your feet slightly apart (about 6 inches). Bend over at the waist and let your upper body hang down. Reach your hands toward the ground. You can bend your knees slightly. For a deeper stretch, grasp your calves and gently pull your upper body toward your legs. You should feel the stretch in your hamstring area, or the back of your thighs.

Thigh Stretch - Stand with your feet slightly apart. Bend your right foot back and up toward your buttocks, and grasp it with your right hand. Balancing on your left leg, pull your right foot up with your right hand. To help you balance, pick a stationary spot in front of you to stare at and lift your free arm out to the side. You should feel the stretch in your thigh. Release and switch sides.

Calf Stretch - Stand with right leg straight and behind you. Your left leg should be bent in front of you. Place most of your weight onto your left leg. Push the heel of your right foot down toward the ground, and slightly shift your weight back keeping your torso upright. You should feel a stretch in your right calf. For a deeper stretch, you can face a wall and push against it for leverage. Release and repeat on the opposite side.

Groin Stretch - Sit with your feet in front of you. Place the bottoms of your feet together, and let your knees fall to the sides. Grasp your ankles and pull your feet toward you, as close as possible. While holding your ankles, place your elbows on the inside of your knees and push them down. You should feel the stretch in your groin area.

For questions or more information on proper training and stretching techniques, please contact Sarah Towing with Columbus Corporate Wellness, LLC – sarah@columbuscorporatewellness.com – 614.452-03824