

Fitness: Stretching and Flexibility

Making flexibility and stretching a part of your whole fitness routine helps give you the freedom to move more easily.

And that helps you reach higher. And helps you bend lower. Or twist and turn.

Whether you're feeling stiff, tight, or just right, you may be able to improve your flexibility (and feel looser) by stretching.

You can stretch anytime and almost anyplace. Because it's no sweat!

Here's how: It's best to warm your muscles a bit before you stretch them. Walk or do some other light aerobic activity for a few minutes, and then start stretching.

Stretch all your major groups of muscles. These include the muscles of your arms, your back, your hips, the front and back of your thighs, and your calves.

Move your joints as far as you can in each direction without causing pain. This can help lubricate and improve how well your joints work.

Remember to do all the little joints too, such as those in your fingers.

When you stretch, do it slowly. Stretching is not about going fast or making sudden movements. You shouldn't push or bounce during a stretch.

Hold each stretch for about 10 to 30 seconds. You should feel a stretch in the muscle, but not pain.

Remember to breathe. Breathe out as you do the stretch. Then breathe in as you hold the stretch.

You may find stretching is a way to relax and find calm in your day.

Start slowly, and when you're ready, reach a little farther.

Bit by bit, inch by inch, you may surprise yourself with what you can do, how you'll move, and how you'll feel.