



## WHY YOU NEED FLEXIBILITY TO STAY HEALTHY

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When it comes to training, most people focus on strength, endurance, and speed but overlook one of the most important components of physical health: flexibility. Moving freely and efficiently is essential for achieving and maintaining physical well-being.

Flexibility boosts athletic performance and is vital for injury prevention. It allows muscles and joints to handle the demands of physical activity. However, you don't need to be an experienced athlete to prioritize flexibility. Adding stretching to your routine is essential for anyone aiming to enhance their overall health.

Written on the advice of our physiotherapist [George Demirakos](#), this article explores why flexibility is important for performance enhancement and injury prevention and how stretching can benefit people of all fitness levels.

## STATIC VS. DYNAMIC STRETCHING: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Stretching comes in many forms, from static to dynamic to ballistic and other types. This article will focus on two primary techniques: static and dynamic stretching. Both play important roles, but their benefits vary depending on when and how they are used. Our physiotherapist, George explains the difference between both forms:

**“Static stretching** is best used after exercising when muscles are warm and pliable. This allows for deeper stretches without the risk of injury. It involves holding a muscle in a stretch position for a period of time. In general, it has been shown that static stretching is most beneficial for athletes when they need to increase flexibility for their sports (e.g. gymnastics, dance, etc.).”

Static stretching is also a relaxing and effective way to end a workout, relieving muscle tightness and preventing stiffness. “Stretching makes me feel loose and full of energy,” says George, “and I find that the feeling of well-being is best achieved when I do a stretch three times, for 30 to 60 seconds, with a 60-second break in between. That is what I typically recommend to my patients.”

**Do you have the proper stretching technique?** George advises on the best way to perform a stretch without risking overstretching:

“Here's how: Assume the stretch position for the muscle, begin the stretch, and when you feel a gentle pulling, stop pushing. Hold the position for at least 60 seconds, then slowly release. Rest for 30 to 60 seconds, then try it again. The stretch can feel a bit uncomfortable, but it should not be at all painful. If you feel pain, stop immediately, and decrease the pressure. Do not for a moment suppose that if you push harder, you will get better results. The opposite is the reality: you might end up hurting yourself instead of giving yourself relief.”

Some examples of static stretching include hamstring, quadriceps, and calf stretches.

On the other hand, **dynamic stretching** is a type of stretching that involves moving parts of your body through controlled movements. Unlike static stretching, where you hold a stretch for some time post-exercise, dynamic stretching focuses on active movements during a warm-up routine to prepare muscles for physical activity.

“Dynamic stretches are ideal before exercise,” explains George, “preparing the muscles for the range of motion and stresses to come, like a good basketball game or a 100-meter dash. It is better used for athletes who engage in sports involving running, jumping, or quick changes in direction, such as basketball players or sprinters.”

Dynamic stretches include leg swings, arm circles, walking lunges, high knees, and torso twists. These movements help activate and loosen up the muscles in preparation for physical activity.

## HOW STRETCHING AFFECTS MUSCLES, TENDONS, AND JOINTS

Stretching plays a crucial role in alleviating muscle tension. It promotes flexibility in muscles, tendons, and joints, helping to prevent injuries. Additionally, stretching enhances blood circulation to the muscles, nourishing and facilitating the removal of waste products, such as lactic acid, that accumulate post-exercise. “Stretching after a workout can reduce soreness and stiffness as well as speed up your recovery,” says George. “It can also release lots of tension that you might be feeling after a workout.”

“Done regularly, stretching can help you maintain range of motion and flexibility throughout your life, no matter your age”, further explains George. “It counters the muscle-shortening effects of bad posture or long hours of sitting in an office, and that means fewer and less acute aches and pains. Stretching is important for your overall health as it makes your daily activities much less stressful on your joints.”

This is also valuable for athletes who perform repetitive movements or engage in high-intensity training. Stretching supports tendon flexibility, which reduces the likelihood of strains and sprains, which are common injuries in many sports. By incorporating regular stretching into their routine, individuals can enhance joint mobility and muscle length, improving performance and reducing the likelihood of injury.

## STRETCHING FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT

Many people neglect flexibility training in favor of strength or endurance exercises, but stretching is crucial for injury prevention and optimal performance. Without sufficient flexibility, the risk of strains, sprains, and muscle imbalances increases. Stretching improves an athlete’s range of motion, enhancing balance, agility, and posture—critical factors for success in sports.

“It can help with your performance by preventing you from getting hurt,” says George, “as well as improving your balance, coordination, and movement when exercising or performing an everyday task. Improved flexibility allows both weekend warriors and high-level athletes to move more efficiently and freely. It is essential for all sports that require a wide range of motion, from boxing to ballet. It can also restore or improve proper body alignment, resulting in improved posture. Stretching can also improve your balance. Having good balance can help you feel lighter on your feet, therefore improving your athletic performance.”

Athletes can enhance their strength, agility, and overall movement efficiency by incorporating static and dynamic stretching into training routines. Additionally, stretching has mental health benefits. It can reduce stress and promote relaxation, releasing endorphins that make you feel good.

Our physiotherapist further explains that “if done correctly stretching can also be a lifesaver to your health and well-being as well as make you even stronger and feel good. It is one of life’s best natural remedies for just about anything that ails you. It can be a perfect end to your exercise routine. We can’t stay young forever, so staying limber and flexible as you get older is a great idea because it will help you be more efficient in your exercises and move better.”

## **WHAT’S THE BEST TIME TO STRETCH?**

Our expert, George explains that “studies show muscles and joints are tightest in the morning. They increase flexibility throughout the day and peak at 7:00 PM. Because muscles and joints are most flexible in the evening, you have a greater range of motion and the ability to stretch more deeply at that time.”

It is also particularly beneficial to stretch after a workout as it aids in muscle recovery and helps to restore proper body alignment by getting rid of muscle stiffness and soreness.

“Stretching before bed helps your body rejuvenate itself during sleep,” says George, “It can also help you avoid discomfort during sleep, especially if you’re someone who experiences muscle spasms during the day.”

## **HOW TO STRETCH PROPERLY: OUR BEST PRACTICES**

Now that we know more about the benefits of stretching, let’s see how we can incorporate it into a training routine. Our physiotherapist gives us his best practices for safe and effective stretching:

“There are very few contraindications when it comes to stretching, but one that we should keep in mind is if you have hyperflexible or unstable joints. Doing stretching exercises in this case would only exacerbate the instability already there. Some of the common mistakes people make are:

- Using stretching as a warmup. Many people make this mistake. You should always engage in light cardio as a warmup before stretching.
- Overstretching. As tempting as it may be to push your stretch a little further, you shouldn’t.
- Forgetting about form. Good stretching is based on proper technique.
- Practicing ballistic stretching. These movements can be too forceful and carry a high risk of injury.
- Holding your breath. It can create unnecessary tension, so remember to breathe deeply and consistently while stretching.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends stretching each major muscle group for at least 30 to 60 seconds every time you stretch, and I agree. Quick stretches, of 15 seconds or so, simply do not give the muscle enough time for optimal lengthening.”

## **STRETCHING AND AGING: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO STAY FLEXIBLE**

"As we age, muscle mass naturally declines and we lose bone density, which leads to reduced flexibility. However, we can reduce this natural decline and improve our flexibility, mobility, and overall movement by stretching frequently and staying active. It is why I recommend stretching every day, even if just once a day. Of course, there are days when you simply cannot, but don't let the lapse last; try to start up again the next day. You can also do it at any time; day or night."

By staying flexible, older adults can maintain better mobility, reduce the risk of falls, and stay more active. Gentle stretching exercises can also help athletes or those with limited mobility restore joint function and improve overall movement quality. As we age, maintaining flexibility becomes even more important, ensuring that we can stay mobile and injury-free for years to come.

## **BETTER FLEXIBILITY: A REMEDY FOR EVERYONE**

Flexibility is not just for elite athletes; it's a fundamental aspect of physical well-being for everyone. Incorporating stretching into your routine can boost your performance, enhance your recovery, and prevent injuries.

Stretching provides numerous benefits that can significantly boost how you feel and perform daily: it improves your balance, posture, and range of motion, leading to a healthier, more active lifestyle. As you work on your flexibility, you'll find that the benefits extend far beyond your athletic performance, improving your physical and mental health at any age.

So, don't underestimate the power of stretching; make it a consistent part of your training routine, and your body will thank you with better performance, less discomfort, and improved overall well-being.