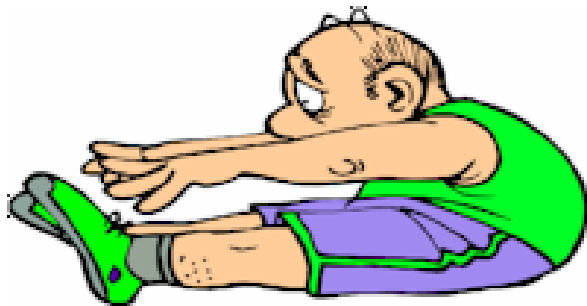


# STRETCH FOR STRENGTH

If stretching is the most neglected aspect of your training regimen, you may want to rethink your reluctance to get flexible. Not only does stretching offer a multitude of health benefits – it can actually boost your prowess in the gym.

## STRETCH FOR STRENGTH

That old adage, “What doesn’t kill you makes your stronger” is especially appropriate when applies to stretching, an activity many fitness buffs include half-heartedly in their workouts or avoid altogether. But there are many reasons why you should make stretching a training priority. Increasing your flexibility not only helps you train more effectively, it allows you to move more freely in your daily activities. Regular stretching increases the range of motion of your movable joints and helps you avoid muscle and joint injuries later in life. This particularly applies to lower back health – it’s estimates that up to 80% of adults will have lower back problems in their lifetime. Many of these problems are a direct result of weak trunk muscles and inflexible lower back muscles, hip flexors, and hamstrings – all of which stretching can fix. But one of the lesser-known benefits of stretching is that in can actually increase muscle strength.



## STRETCHING FOR STRENGTH

Athletes have used the contract-relax stretching method for years to get fit and flexible. This technique involves taking a joint to the “endpoint of movement” by one group of muscles, followed by a muscle contraction of the opposing muscles. The neurological mechanisms at play are quite complex and involve muscle spindles and golgi tendon organs, but the basic premise is that by

performing muscle contractions at their furthest range of motion, you are actually strengthening the muscles where they are most vulnerable – thereby increasing strength and flexibility at the same time.

## WHEN TO STRETCH

For years fitness trainers and coaches have prescribed flexibility exercises before cardio workouts and sports events to minimize possible injury. However, in a flexibility article published in the *American College of Sports Medicine’s Health and Fitness Journal*, exercise physiologist Dr. Mike Bracko summarizes recent research on stretching which shows that re-workout stretching does not prevent injuries associated with exercise. In fact, a review of 12 studies on stretching revealed that in 8 of the 12 studies, stretching before exercising either made no difference to the rate of injury or actually increased the risk. While you do need to warm your body before training, stretching to lengthen your muscles should be performed after your workout, not before. The best warm-up preparation before exercise is to do 3 to 5 minutes of low intensity walking, jogging, or running to better prepare your ankles and lower legs for the upcoming bout of exercise.

## STRETCHING BENEFITS

Some trainers attempt to rationalize their reasons for not including stretching in a workout by saying it has very few benefits, so here's a list of all the proven benefits of stretching:

- An increase in functional range of motion
- Reduction of lower back pain and back injury
- Reduction in the incidence and severity of injury when performed after the workout to increase range of motion
- Improvement in posture
- Prevention and alleviation of muscle soreness after exercise
- Increase in the level of certain skills and muscular efficiency
- Promotion of mental relaxation
- An opportunity for spiritual growth, meditation, and self-evaluation
- Personal enjoyment and gratification

If you have any questions about proper stretches or exercises, contact a professional or clinic that specializes in musculo-skeletal and sport related injuries. Remember, pain is your body's indication of a problem. If you experience any pain or discomfort, aside from normal muscle stretching, stop or change the type of stretch you are doing.



**NOVA Pain & Rehab Center specializes in helping you **Stretch for Strength**. If you or someone you know is having a problem, call us today and schedule an appointment for a consultation and an evaluation. **Call 703-535-8887 to schedule your appointment**. Remember, waiting to see if the problem will resolve on its own could invite a more serious condition. Get yourself checked out **TODAY!****