

Ready to Stretch?

by John C. Gifford, CBPM, NCTMB - Owner, Motionwise®

Let me go over some basic guidelines to ensure that you get the most from the time and energy invested in your stretching program. I have three simple guidelines when I coach people on their stretching.

Remember my "3 R's" of stretching and you will achieve the maximum benefits of stretching with the least risk of injury.

RELAX. Your body should be relaxed when you stretch. How often have you seen someone scrunch their face, grunt, and strain as they try to push their head to their knees? I always tell my students that you cannot beat the body into submission. You are trying to invite the muscle to relax and lengthen. The same principle applies to stretching. Only stretch as far as you can while keeping your jaw, shoulders, and other body areas relaxed and calm.

RESPIRATE. Any of my patients will tell you I am not a fan of holding stretches for a number of seconds. People who count in their stretching tend to hold their breath, focus on outcome rather than process, and have a higher risk of injury to themselves when stretching.

The alternative is to hold a stretch for a number of breaths. This simple method will help facilitate the lengthening of your muscles.

REGULAR. In my experience, the chronic shortening and tensing of muscles is best interrupted as the day progresses with periodic simple movements rather than one large group of moves to eliminate all the tightness that was created in your day. Stretching is for life. Who cares if it takes a year for you to develop a consistent stretching program. Better to start with a few simple moves you can successfully practice throughout the day than an involved routine that will be hard to maintain.

In over twenty years of practice my patients have had great success utilizing simple stretches and movements that can be performed on a chair or standing for a minute or two. After their first visit with me patients always want a 30-60 minute stretching exercise to take home. My response? "I'll give you three - 60 second moves you can do throughout the day, 3-5 times per day. Keep that going for two weeks and then we will create a longer program." We usually don't get to a longer program.

A little consistent stretching can create huge gains in reduced tension and muscle tightness. Caution! Only stretch the muscles you want to keep! Till next time,

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Photo by Darlene Czech

John Gifford has performed over 30,000 sessions as an approved provider of sports massage and a unique style of bodywork called Bonnie Prudden Myotherapy® and Exercise Therapy. His mission as a clinician, lecturer, consultant, and author is to empower people to lead more active, successful, and fulfilling lives through the reduction and prevention of their muscular pain and tension.

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