

The Best Time to Stretch?

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

As any of my clients will tell you, I am a big fan of stretching to help maintain pliability and oxygen permeability of muscle tissues. Muscles that are pliable are less prone to injury and spasms which result from reduced oxygen levels in muscle tissue.

One of the most frequent questions asked by my clients is, "When is the best time to stretch? Should I stretch in the morning? I heard that's the best time. Another person says no, the evening is better so you have a more restful sleep. Some say at the beginning of your workout, and others say at the end of your exercise routine. . . ."

Here's my take. To start, one factor in deciding the very best time to engage in a flexibility regimen, or any discipline for that matter, is to know yourself well enough to know when you have the least resistance to performing the activity. In short, the best time to stretch is when you will take the time to do it.

That having been said, if you are performing gentle range of motion stretches where little intensity is involved and the main goal is to establish some movement to relieve general fatigue and stiffness, reduce tension, or provide gentle re-training of muscles, then frequency is more important than

duration or timing (that type of stretching will be covered in a future article).

However, if you are planning on turning up the intensity to make flexibility gains or to rehab an injury in which increasing range of motion is a key factor in healing, then here is a good rule to follow: If you are not sweating, hold off on the stretching. Why? Muscles, like other tissues, are more pliable as core temperature increases. Take a rubber band out of the freezer and stretch it. The result? Now take another rubber band out of the freezer and allow it to warm before you apply tension. This time you have a completely different outcome.

Stretching as warm up at the very least is not going to increase your flexibility greatly and at the worst is going to irritate your muscles as they are forced to lengthen with inadequate warmth.

You will receive better flexibility gains, injury prevention, and greater overall results from your time stretching when you work to lengthen muscles after you have worked up a good sweat.

Keep your muscles happy and they won't get bent out of shape! Till next time,

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



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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