

Stretching

Why stretch?

- Stretching is useful for both injury prevention and injury treatment.
- If done properly, stretching increases flexibility, this can directly translate into reduced risk of injury. A muscle/tendon group with a greater range of motion will be less likely to experience tears when used actively.
- Stretching is thought to improve recovery and may enhance athletic performance.
- Stretching improves your balance, coordination, and circulation. This increases blood flow to your muscles often speeding the recovery process after muscle injuries.
- Flexible muscles can improve your daily performance in tasks such as lifting and bending.
- Stretching promotes better posture. Frequent stretching keeps your muscles from getting tight, allowing you to maintain proper posture and minimize aches and pains.
- Stretching can relieve stress by relaxing the tense muscles that often accompany stress.
- Stretching before work tasks helps you focus on working safely.

Stretching safely:

- Stretching should be a key part of your exercise program.
- Stretching before physical activity will prepare your body.
- Stretching after your work promotes better range of motion of your joints.
- When stretching:
 - Follow the instructions of your medical care provider!
 - Stay within your comfort range! Expect to feel some tension when stretching. If you feel pain, you've gone too far.
 - Move slowly and support your body.
 - Hold each stretch for 10-15 seconds.
 - Breathe freely as you hold each stretch; try not to hold your breath.

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Stretching essentials:

- Target major muscle groups: When you are stretching, focus on your calves, thighs, hips, lower back, neck and shoulders.
 - Stretch muscles and joints that you routinely use at work or play.
- Warm up first: Stretching muscles when they are cold increases your risk of injury, including pulled muscles.
 - Warm up by walking while gently pumping your arms, or do a favorite exercise at low intensity for five minutes.
 - Stretch after you exercise — when your muscles are warm and more receptive to stretching.
- Know how often to stretch: As a general rule, stretch before and after a manual task or exercise.
 - If you do not exercise regularly, you might want to stretch at least three times a week to maintain flexibility.
 - If you have a problem area, such as tightness in the back of your leg, you might want to stretch every day or even twice a day.
- Know when to exercise caution: If you have a chronic condition or an injury, you may need to alter your approach to stretching.
 - If you have a strained muscle, stretching it may cause further harm.
 - Discuss the best way to stretch with your medical provider.

Concluding points for reducing your risk:

- Correct posture alleviates stress on muscles, tendons and nerves.
- Take periodic stretch breaks.
- After work, enjoy activities that use other muscles. Try activities such as swimming and jogging which use different muscles.
- Your health contributes significantly to your success on and off the job.
- Our number one goal is to keep you healthy and safe at work.

Stretching

Sample stretches (continued):

Wrist and finger extension:

- This stretch is for your wrists and fingers.
- Clench your hand into a fist. Hold this position for three seconds.
- Relax, and repeat this stretch five times on each hand.
- Now open your hand spreading the fingers as wide as possible. Hold this position for three seconds.
- Relax, and repeat this stretch five times on each hand.



Stretching

Sample stretches (continued):

Neck stretch:

- This stretch is for your shoulders and neck.
- Keep your shoulders and neck in level position. Lean your neck to the left; hold for 10-15 seconds and repeat on the opposite side.



Stretching

Sample stretches (continued):

Disk relievers:

- This stretch is for your lower back.
- Standing up straight with your feet slightly apart, place your hands in the hollow of your back. Support yourself, and use a helper as needed.
- Focus your eyes on a point straight ahead, and bend *slightly* backwards without bending your knees.
- Don't hold this position. Return carefully to the upright position.



Alternate disk reliever:

- Lean slightly to the left without bending your knees.
- Hold this position for 10-15 seconds. Return carefully to the upright position and repeat on the other side.

