

# Section 11

# Flexibility



# 4-Women's Health

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## Flexibility - Benefits

Flexibility is a joint's ability to move through a full range of motion. Flexibility training (stretching) is not about becoming a world class gymnast—it's about balancing the muscle groups you use or overuse during exercise and other activities, or from bad posture. Read on to learn about the benefits of a good flexibility program.

### 1. Improved Performance, Decreased Injury Risk

A safe and effective flexibility training program increases physical performance. A flexible joint greatly decreases your risk of injury—it has the ability to move through a greater range of motion and requires less energy to do so. Stretching decreases resistance in tissue structures; you are, therefore, less likely to become injured by exceeding tissue extensibility (maximum range of tissues) during activity.

### 2. Reduced Muscle Soreness

Recent studies show that slow, static stretching helps reduce muscle soreness after exercise. Static stretching involves a slow, gradual and controlled elongation of the muscle through the full range of motion, held for 15-30 seconds, in the furthest comfortable position (without pain).

### 3. Improved Posture

Stretching also improves muscular balance and posture. Many people's soft-tissue structures have adapted poorly to either the effects of gravity or poor postural habits. Stretching can help realign soft tissue structures, thus reducing the effort it takes to achieve and maintain good posture in the activities of daily living.

### 4. Reduced Risk of Low Back Pain

Stretching reduces the risk of low back pain by promoting muscular relaxation. A muscle in constant contraction requires more energy to accomplish activities. Flexibility in the hamstrings, hip flexors, quadriceps, and other muscles attaching to the pelvis reduces stress to the low back. Stretching causes muscular relaxation, which results in reduction of accumulated toxins, less muscle shortening or tightening, and less fatigue.

### 5. Increased Blood and Nutrients to Tissues

Another great benefit: stretching increases blood supply and nutrients to joint structures. Stretching increases tissue temperature, which in turn increases circulation and nutrient transport. This allows greater elasticity of surrounding tissues and increases performance. Stretching also increases joint synovial fluid, which is a lubricating fluid that promotes the transport of more nutrients to the joints' articular cartilage. This allows a greater range of motion and reduces joint degeneration.



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