

# Stretching

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The number of times that I've seen someone finish their vigorous workout and leave the gym without stretching is way too high to count. And the number of times these same people have ended up injured and on the shelf is even higher!

Despite being one the 5 major characteristics that define a truly fit person; outside of the yoga studio, flexibility is often ignored. However this is a major oversight! Stretching not only helps to prevent injury by relaxing tightly coiled muscles allowing them to move freely, it also helps prevent subsequent pain and discomfort. Additionally, stretching is key for correcting postural issues and body alignment.

At this point, I'd hope that at least a few of you are reconsidering your current "anti-stretching" paradigm. If so, here are three keys to remember when incorporating flexibility into your routine.

**Preheat the Oven:** Unfortunately many of our old gym teachers and childhood coaches got it wrong. Starting your workout by touching your toes and twisting your body into a pretzel is not the smartest approach. In recent years, active, dynamic movement based warm-up routines have taken the place of simply standing and stretching first thing. What does this all mean? Honestly, it's not as complicated as it sounds. Walk, skip, hop, go up and down a flight of stairs – anything active works here really. Cold, tight muscles don't move well so going right into deep stretches could actually do more harm than good. Your main objective should be to simply awaken your body through moderate cardiovascular movements. So don't go into full sprint mode here just yet; it's the same reason you wouldn't start your car and floor it to 100 miles per hour! If you know how to use a foam roller (or have someone knowledgeable you can ask for help) this is another great option to start your routine off with. Once you've adequately warmed up your entire body, you can then take your workout or stretching program in any direction you'd like and attack your routine with an increased drive and mental focus.

**Take a Stand:** Modern technology is both a gift and a curse. Sure, things are more convenient now, however the result of these comforts is often times complacency and laziness. If your job requires that you sit at a desk all day, your flexibility is likely to take a turn for the worse if you don't make a conscious effort to avoid this outcome. Sitting all day can lead to a world of painful issues ranging from tight hips, sore necks, achy backs and postural issues. With that said, it's extremely

important that you make time to get up at least once per hour to move around a bit. You'll also want to shake bad habits such as leaning your neck forward toward the computer screen or carrying tension in your upper back and shoulders. These much needed hourly breaks will provide you with time to shake off the tension and regain mobility in your hands, limbs and achy muscles. Some progressive offices have even installed desks that can be raised so that you can stand yet still continue working. Others have ergonomic keyboards or foot supports to promote improved body alignment. Whatever your solution, get up and get moving throughout the day, so long as that walk you're taking every hour isn't to the candy machine!

**The Final Stretch:** After your warm up is complete or your work out is over, you can now transition over to doing traditional static stretches. However this may be another area where your former coach may have failed you so if you're still bouncing your limbs as you stretch, it's time for you to refresh your routine. Instead, you'll want to hold each position for at least 10 to 30 seconds. The only movement that should occur is as you exhale to possibly go deeper into the stretch, otherwise stay still! The goal here is not to torque and further stress the muscle but instead to relax it and allow it to stretch to it's full range of motion. Try to learn at least one good stretch for each major muscle group on your body. This might also be another opportunity to use the foam roller or a lacrosse ball if you're adept in those techniques. Still stuck for ideas? Perhaps you should utilize a trained professional or a massage therapist to help you out. Or try dropping into a beginner yoga class and picking the instructors brain after class to learn an even greater array of stretches and relaxation techniques. No matter how you get it done, you'll need to start training your flexibility just as you'd train your muscular strength, endurance or your cardiovascular system. As a result, you'll end up less sore, literally walking taller and less susceptible to injury.



*Darrell W. Butler has trained, managed and consulted for fitness centers and media outlets around the world. When he's not training a client or sharing his words of wisdom, you can catch him drinking a PFC Berries A'More Recovery Shake at his local gym's juice bar! For more information visit the Darrell Butler Personal Training website at [www.dbptonline.com](http://www.dbptonline.com)*

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