



7 Steps to Proper Stretching

By the Mayo Clinic Staff
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STEP 1: Always WARM UP. Stretching muscles while they are still stiff and “cold” can actually increase your risk of injury. Warm up your muscles by walking or lightly jogging for five minutes. After you have properly warmed up, then begin gently stretching your muscles.

STEP 2: Hold the stretch for at least 30 seconds. It is important to hold the stretch long enough to completely stretch the muscle. Research shows that if you hold it for at least 30 seconds, then you will only have to stretch each muscle once. For really tight muscles you may have to hold the stretch longer than 30 seconds. It is not recommended that you hold any stretch longer than 60 seconds, though.



STEP 3: No Bouncing. Bouncing actually damages your muscle and can actually make you more inflexible. Bouncing creates small tears in the muscle, called microtears. As these microtears heal, scar tissue is formed. This tightens your muscles even further causing inflexibility and even pain.

STEP 4: It should NOT be painful. If you feel pain while stretching then you are over-stretching the muscle. Release the stretch a little, just to point where you no longer feel any pain.

STEP 5: Breathe. While you stretch, concentrate on your breathing. Practicing deep, relaxing breathing while stretching may help you relieve stress.



STEP 6: Equally stretch both sides. Don't favor one leg or arm. Stretch both sides of the body equally, thus improving your range of motion on both sides.

STEP 7: Always stretch before and after exercising. Lightly stretch after your warm-up in the beginning of your work out. At the end of the work out, stretch more thoroughly and lengthen all the major muscles groups.

**** Basic stretching should focus on all the major muscles groups including the calves, thighs, hips, shoulders, lower back, and neck. If you play a particular sport you may want to concentrate your stretching on certain muscles groups that you use in that sport. For example, if you play baseball regularly you may want to perform a few extra shoulder stretches.**

**** For pictures showing how to stretch the major muscle groups please visit the Mayo Clinic website at the following link:**

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stretching/SM00043>

