

Stretching: Focus on flexibility

- Stretch when you exercise or at least three times a week to maintain flexibility.
- Hold for 10-20 seconds (3-5 times) without a bouncing motion. This can be included after a warm-up or during a cool down. Stretch to mild discomfort, not pain
- Warm up first. Stretching muscles when they're cold increases your risk of pulled muscles. Warm up by doing a favorite exercise at low intensity for five minutes.
- Hold each stretch for at least 30 seconds. It takes time to lengthen tissues safely. Hold your stretches for at least 30 seconds — and up to 60 seconds for a really tight muscle or problem area.
- Don't bounce. Bouncing as you stretch can cause small tears (microtears) in the muscle, which leave scar tissue as the muscle heals. The scar tissue tightens the muscle even further, making you even less flexible — and more prone to pain.
- Focus on a pain-free stretch. If you feel pain as you stretch, you've gone too far. Back off to the point where you don't feel any pain, then hold the stretch.
- Relax and breathe freely. Don't hold your breath while you're stretching.
- Stretch both sides. Make sure your joint range of motion is as equal as possible on each side of your body.
- Stretch before and after. Light stretching after your warm-up followed by a more thorough stretching regimen after your workout is your best bet.

Stretching Slide Show:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stretching/SM00043&slide=1>

Adapted from *Stretching: Focus on Flexibility*

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