

Benefits of stretching:

Stretching works by forcing the elastic connective tissue (the fascia) surrounding a muscle to lengthen. Frequent stretching can actually make the entire muscle longer. The most obvious benefit of stretching is increased flexibility, that is, a joint's ability to move through its entire range of motion. However, increased flexibility provides a number of other advantages, such as helping balance muscle groups within the body, improving balance and posture, increasing agility and decreasing the risk of injury. A lack of flexibility can contribute to stiffness, poor posture, back pain and movement limitations as muscles become shorter, tighter and weaker.

Safety tips:

- Before starting a stretching routine, perform a 5-10 minute full body **warm up** by walking stairs, marching or dancing.
- Carefully get into the stretch position and gently take up muscle slack until a stretch is felt.
- Pay close attention to **posture** and **body alignment** and stretch one specific muscle at a time
- **Hold** the stretch and take out slack as the muscle relaxes. **Do not bounce** while stretching. Simply **hold** the stretch, **breathe deeply** and **relax**.
- Use a chair or wall for support if necessary.
- Stretches should be performed at least once and ideally twice a day to achieve maximum increases in flexibility.
- Stretches should be performed both before and after activity. Stretches **before** an activity - either occupational or sport - can be specific to muscles used in that activity. Stretching to enhance one's general flexibility should be performed **after** an activity when the core body temperature is higher.