

Stretching techniques

There are several types of stretching techniques, including:

- dynamic
- static
- ballistic
- PNF
- passive
- active stretching

The most common forms of stretches are static and dynamic:

- **Static stretches** involve holding a stretch in a comfortable position for a period of time, typically between 10 and 30 seconds. This form of stretching is most beneficial after you exercise.
- **Dynamic stretches** are active movements that cause your muscles to stretch, but the stretch is not held in the end position. These stretches are usually done before exercise to get your muscles ready for movement.

Tips:

- Use dynamic stretches before exercise to prepare your muscles.
- Use static stretches after exercise to reduce your risk for injury.

How to start a stretching routine:

If you're new to a regular stretching routine, take it slow. Just like other forms of physical activity, your body needs time to get used to the stretches you're performing.

You also need a solid grasp of proper form and technique. Otherwise, you risk getting injured.

You can stretch any time during the day. On days you exercise:

- aim for 5 to 10 minutes of dynamic stretching prior to your activity
- do another 5 to 10 minutes of static or PNF stretching after your workout

On days when you aren't exercising, still plan to schedule at least 5 to 10 minutes of time for stretching. This can help improve flexibility and reduce muscle tightness and pain.

When stretching, focus on the major areas of your body that help with mobility, such as your calves, hamstrings, hip flexors, and quadriceps. For upper-body relief, try moves that stretch the shoulders, neck, and lower back.

Hold each stretch for 30 seconds and avoid bouncing.

You can stretch after each workout or athletic event, or daily after your muscles are warmed up.

Risks and safety tips:

Stretching may not always be safe:

- **If you have an acute or existing injury**, only perform stretches recommended by your doctor.
- **If you have a chronic or nagging injury**, consider talking with a sports medicine specialist or physical therapist to design a stretching protocol that fits your needs.
- **If you have any physical limitations that prevent you from properly performing a stretching exercise**, consult your doctor for alternative exercises that can help increase your flexibility.

Regardless of your fitness level, there are a few standard safety tips for stretching that you should follow:

- **Don't bounce.** Years ago, ballistic stretching was thought to be the best way to increase flexibility. Now, experts suggest you avoid bouncing unless these types of stretches have been recommended to you by a doctor or physical therapist.
- **Don't stretch beyond the point of comfort.** While it's normal to feel some tension when stretching a muscle, you should never feel pain. If the area you are stretching starts to hurt, back off the stretch until you don't feel any discomfort.
- **Don't overdo it.** Like other forms of exercise, stretching puts stress on your body. If you're stretching the same muscle groups multiple times a day, you risk over-stretching and causing damage.
- **Don't go into your stretches cold.** Cold muscles are not as pliable, which makes stretching a lot more difficult. The best time to stretch is after you work out, but if you're not exercising before performing your

stretches, consider warming up for 5 to 10 minutes with some light cardio, such as walking or jogging.

The takeaway:

Whether you're new to exercise or a seasoned athlete, you can benefit from a regular stretching routine. By incorporating 5 to 10 minutes of dynamic and static stretches into your daily workout, you can increase your range of motion, improve your posture, and ease your mind.

