

STRETCHING – LEADER’S GUIDE

WHY SHOULD YOU STRETCH?

Taffy

Go to your refrigerator; take out a piece of cold taffy. Give it a stretch and guess what . . . it doesn’t, stretch that is. In fact what it does do is break! Next warm-up the taffy and then give it a stretch — now it actually stretches.

Taffy is a lot like the connective tissue that forms the matrix of our muscles, ligaments, tendons, nerves, blood vessels and so on. When warm these tissues are much more likely to stretch and not be injured compared to when they are cold and stiff.

Increased Blood Flow

Stretching not only warms up the body, it also increases blood flow to the working tissues of the body to provide more oxygen and nutrition.

Control Joint Stiffness

Stretching helps to control joint stiffness; less stiff, more flexible and more comfortable!

Bottom Line . . . Why Stretch?

- Improves alertness levels
- Helps to prevent injuries
- Controls stress
- Reduces muscle tension
- Increases flexibility
- IT FEELS GOOD!



WHEN SHOULD YOU STRETCH?

Stretch before work, during breaks and after physical activity. This will help you get ready, keep you ready and help you to cool down once the activity is done.

Group Stretch Sessions

Stretching as a group is a great way to stretch. When the group as a whole stretches each individual member of the group feels more comfortable doing the stretches.

Individual Stretch Sessions

Periodically (every 30 to 60 minutes) also do one or two of the stretches at a time. Tie the particular stretch to a particular job task or part of the body —for example if you have been using hands to grip materials and tools do one of the hand stretches.

HOW SHOULD YOU STRETCH?

Stretching Rules

Follow Medical Restrictions Absolutely have to follow doctor’s orders for any restricted activities.

Technically Correct Stretches must be performed correctly. Sloppy technique will not provide desired benefits and increases the risk of technique related problems.

Energy Input/Output Stretching benefits are directly tied to effort exerted. If very little energy goes in very little energy comes out with little or no benefit.

Stretching Guidelines

Joint noises Some joint noises - snaps, crackles and pops - are normal, but if you hear or feel more than this stop the movement and investigate.

Regular and consistent performance Stretching is really ‘breathing’ for the muscles and other tissues of the body. Just like you need to take oxygen into your lungs on a consistent basis you need to stretch regularly.

Neutral position Stretch from the Neutral Body Position.

Breathing Do not hold your breath when stretching. Inhale with the stretch and exhale with relaxation of the stretch.

Controlled stretching Always stretch in a slow controlled graceful way with no fast, jerky movements. You should not experience any ‘pain’ during the stretch.

Intensity Start slow and increase intensity on a gradual level. Don’t compete with anyone. Listen to what your body is telling you about how hard to push.

Assess response Always assess response on an on-going basis. Here are some comments to consider.

Typical normal comments:

- “I feel warmth in the area stretched.” (This may linger for a few minutes – means blood flow has been enhanced to the area!)
- “I feel a tingling in the area stretched.” (It goes away shortly after the stretch is released- nerves have been stretched.)

Comments to watch out for and may call for modification of the stretch:

- “I am still really sore after I stretch.” (Need to back off on intensity.)
- “I feel pain down into my arm or leg.” (Quite rare, indicates the need for further investigation.)

Unacceptable sensations

- Discomfort does not go away with warm up activity
- Radiating pain into the arm or leg
- Dizziness
- Sick to stomach feeling

Modify Stretch

- Decrease range of movement
- Decrease forcefulness
- Refrain from stretch
- If under control - gradually add back into routine.
- If issue not resolved - refer to appropriate party.

SAFETY FIRST!!

Always use proper technique, pay attention to your body’s response to the stretches and immediately report any concerns or issues.