



Stretching: Is it really worth it?

Individuals are regularly seen in weight workouts and cardio workouts at the gym, but what about stretching. Stretching is recommended by health professionals and flexibility is even a part of total health related physical fitness. Often times stretching is skipped during a workout because the results are not seen as easily as they are with weights and cardio. It is unfortunate regardless of the reason that stretching is skipped, because the benefits are numerous and include, but are not limited to:

- Increased muscle/tendon length and range of motion causing:
 - Less chance of muscle / tendon strains
 - Easier and greater ability to move freely
- Reduced muscle soreness by:
 - Lengthening muscle fibers to prevent muscular strain
 - Improving blood circulation to muscles to prevent stiffness
 - Increase waste product removal in muscles that causes soreness (lactic acid)
- Reduced fatigue by lessening work required to move limbs in different direction
- Increase in agility through greater ability for balance and control of muscles

Just as the benefits of stretching are numerous, the opportunities for when to stretch are numerous as well. It is recommended that individuals stretch daily and more specifically around the following activities:

- Before physical activity
 - stretch dynamically (not static holding stretches) to warm muscles up for movement
- After physical activity
 - A static holding stretch works muscles best after activity
- Morning after waking up
 - Get stiffness out of muscles from long period of inactivity
- Before bed
 - Reduce amount of stiffness and soreness accumulated during sleep

Stretching at the same time daily helps create a routine so that it is not forgotten. While just stretching is a good start, there are different types of stretching for different times. The biggest difference between the different types of stretching is whether or not the muscles are already warm. The two main types of stretching include:

- Dynamically stretching
 - Normally done as a warm-up stretch when the muscles are not warm yet
 - Consists of stretches that are done thru movement for 10-20 repetitions
 - Gets muscles and mind ready for upcoming activity
- Statically stretching
 - Performed after muscles have previously been warmed up
 - Stretches that are held in the same position for 15 to 60 seconds
 - Relax and take deep breathes when stretching

Improvements in flexibility are possible as a result of stretching, but won't happen overnight. Small improvements in flexibility normally take at least 8 weeks after following a regular routine of daily stretching.