

How to Stretch

Stretching is easy to learn. But there is a right way and a wrong way to stretch. The right way is a relaxed, sustained stretch with your attention focused on the muscle being stretched. The wrong way (unfortunately practiced by many people), is to bounce up and down, or to stretch to the point of pain: these methods can actually do more harm than good.

If you stretch correctly and regularly, you will find that every movement you make becomes easier. It will take time to loosen up tight muscles or muscle groups, but time is quickly forgotten when you start to feel good.

The Easy Stretch

When you begin a stretch, spend 10-30 seconds in the **easy stretch**. No bouncing! Go to the point where you feel a **mild tension**, and relax as you hold the stretch. The feeling of tension should subside as you hold the position. If it does not, ease off slightly and find a degree of tension that is comfortable. The easy stretch reduces muscular tightness and readies the tissues for the developmental stretch.

The Developmental Stretch

After the easy stretch, move slowly into the **developmental stretch**. Again, no bouncing. Move a fraction of an inch further until you again feel a **mild tension** and hold for 10-30 seconds. Be in control. Again, the tension should diminish: if not, ease off slightly. The developmental stretch fine-tunes the muscles and increases flexibility.

Breathing

Your breathing should be slow, rhythmical and under control. If you are bending forward to do a stretch, exhale as you bend forward and then breathe slowly as you hold the stretch. Do not hold your breath while stretching. If a stretch position inhibits your natural breathing pattern, then you are obviously not relaxed. Just ease up on the stretch so you can breathe naturally.

Counting

At first, silently count the seconds for each stretch; this will insure that you hold the proper tension for a long enough time. After a while, you will be stretching by the way it feels, without the distraction of counting.

The Stretch Reflex

Your muscles are protected by a mechanism called the stretch reflex. Any time you stretch the muscle fibres too far (either by bouncing or overstretching), a nerve reflex responds by sending a signal to the muscle to contract; this keeps the muscles from being injured. Therefore, when you stretch too far, you tighten the very muscles you are trying to stretch! (You get a similar involuntary muscle reaction when you accidentally touch something hot; before you can think about it, your body quickly moves away from the heat.)

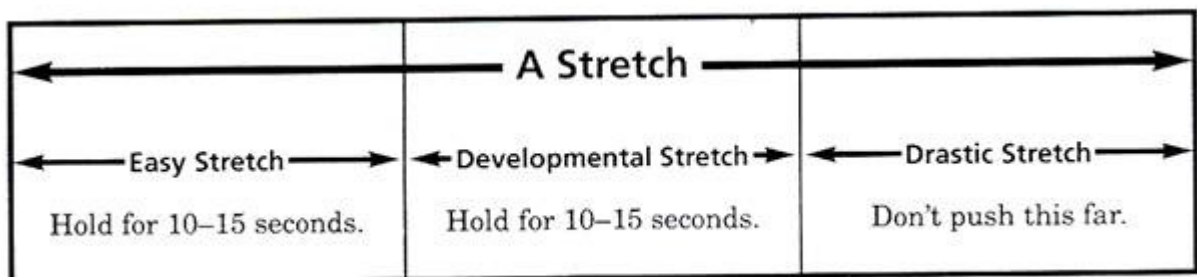
Pushing a stretch as far as you can go or bouncing up and down strains the muscles and activates the stretch reflex. This causes pain, as well as physical damage due to the microscopic tearing of muscle fibres. This in turn leads to the formation of scar tissue in the muscle fibres, with a gradual loss of elasticity. The muscles become stiff and sore. It's hard to get enthused about daily stretching and exercise when you're pushing it to the point of pain!

No Gain with Pain

Many of us were conditioned in high school to the idea of "no gain without pain." We learned to associate pain with physical improvement, and were taught that "...the more it hurts, the more you get out of it." Don't be fooled. Stretching, when done correctly, is not painful. Learn to pay attention to your body, for pain is an indication that something is wrong.

The easy and developmental stretches, as described on the previous page do not activate the stretch reflex and do not cause pain.

This Diagram Will Give You an Idea of a "Good Stretch"

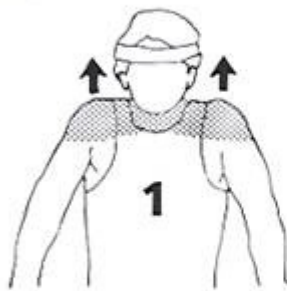


The straight line diagram represents the stretch which is possible with your muscles and their connective tissue. You will find that your flexibility will naturally increase when you stretch, first in the easy, then in the developmental phase. By regularly with comfortable and painless feelings you will be able to go beyond your present limits and come closer to your personal potential.

Before and After Weight Training

Approximately 7 Minutes

Warm up by using a stationary bike or treadmill, etc., for 3-5 minutes before stretching.



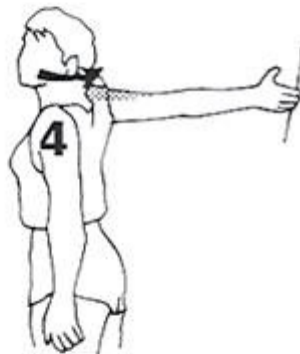
5 seconds
2 times
(page 46)



10 seconds
each arm
(page 43)



8-10 seconds
each side
(page 44)



10 seconds
each arm
(page 82)



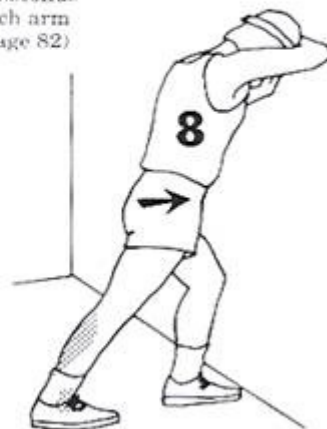
15 seconds
(page 46)



10 seconds
(page 46)



10 seconds
each side
(page 81)



15 seconds
each leg
(page 71)



10-15 seconds
each leg
(page 75)



10

10–15 seconds
(page 66)



Stretch between sets
to promote “active
rest” and to keep your
circulation moving.



12

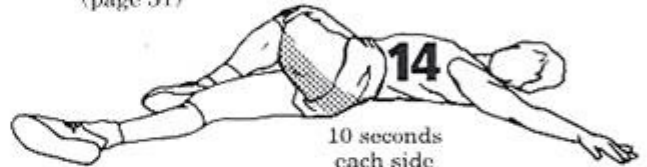
10–15 seconds
(page 58)



15–20 seconds
each leg
(page 51)



3–5 seconds
2 times
(page 27)



10 seconds
each side
(page 32)



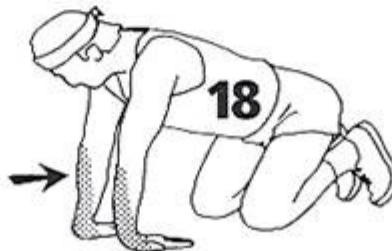
15 seconds
each leg
(page 31)



10–15 seconds
each leg
(page 58)



10 seconds
each arm
(page 42)



15 seconds
(page 42)

Short on time?
Do this mini-routine:
1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11
Approx. 3 minutes