

STRETCH



Many individuals who participate in aerobic activity do so to improve their cardiovascular endurance and to burn calories. Many also train to develop strength and build lean muscle tissue. Unfortunately, flexibility training is the one element of the fitness routine that's often neglected, despite its important contributions to overall function, health and performance. It helps provide greater freedom of movement and improved posture, increases physical and mental relaxation, releases muscle tension and soreness and reduces the risk of injury.

Some individuals are naturally more flexible. Flexibility is strongly influenced by a person's gender, age, body shape and level of physical activity. As individuals grow older, they tend to lose flexibility, usually as a result of physical

inactivity, but also partially because of the aging process itself. The less active you are, the less flexible you are likely to be. As with other components of physical fitness, flexibility improves with regular training.

A SAFE, SIMPLE APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE STRETCHING

Before stretching, take a few minutes to warm up, as stretching cold muscles may increase your chances for injury. Begin with a simple, low-intensity warm-up such as walking while swinging your arms in a wide circle. Spend at least 5- 10 minutes warming up prior to stretching. The general recommendation for people starting an exercise program is to perform gentle dynamic-type stretches before a workout, and static stretches afterwards.

HING

AN INTEGRAL PART OF YOUR FITNESS ROUTINE

by Cedric X. Bryant, PhD, FACSM



WHEN PERFORMING A STATIC STRETCH:

- TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND SLOWLY EXHALE AS YOU GENTLY STRETCH THE MUSCLE TO A POINT OF TENSION.
- HOLD THE STRETCH FOR 15-30 SECONDS, RELAX AND THEN REPEAT THE STRETCH TWO TO FOUR MORE TIMES.
- DON'T BOUNCE A STRETCH. HOLDING A STRETCH IS MORE EFFECTIVE AND THERE IS LESS RISK OF INJURY.
- DON'T STRETCH A MUSCLE THAT IS NOT WARMED UP.
- DON'T STRAIN OR PUSH A MUSCLE TOO FAR. IF A STRETCH HURTS, EASE UP.
- DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH DURING THE STRETCH; CONTINUE TO BREATHE NORMALLY.

THE FOLLOWING STRETCHES ARE EASY TO IMPLEMENT FROM ANYWHERE AND TARGET THE MUSCLES THAT NEED LENGTHENING THROUGHOUT THE DAY.



SIDE NECK STRETCH

BENEFIT: Helps relieve tension in the muscles of the neck and jaw.

HOW TO PERFORM: Slowly tilt your left ear toward your shoulder. Place the top of your right hand on the lower part of your back, and roll your right shoulder down and away from your ear. Place your left hand with slight pressure on the top of your head. Slightly lift your chin and keep your jaw open. Hold for five deep breaths, release and repeat on the opposite side.



SEATED FIGURE FOUR STRETCH

BENEFIT: Helps relieve tension in the muscles of the hips and buttocks.

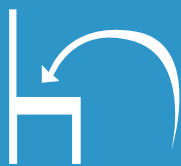
HOW TO PERFORM: Sit upright with a neutral spine. Cross your right leg over your left and rest your hands on your shins. For a deeper stretch, lean your torso slightly forward. Hold for five deep breaths, release and repeat on your left leg.



SEATED LATERAL STRETCH

BENEFIT: Helps relieve tension in the muscles of the upper and mid-back region.

HOW TO PERFORM: Sit upright with your feet firmly planted on the ground. Keep your spine neutral and place hands interlocked behind your head. Hold and allow your chest to open for three breaths while your elbows open to the side. Exhale, and laterally flex the spine on your left side (imagine the left side of your rib cage moves closer to your hip bone). Hold for five deep breaths, return to center and repeat on the opposite side.



DOWNWARD FACING DOG WITH CHAIR

BENEFIT: Helps relieve tension in the muscles of the chest and back of the legs.

HOW TO PERFORM: Stand upright and walk your feet slightly in front of your hips. Hinge at your hips and place your hands on your chair or door handle. Push your hips back as you bring your chest parallel to the floor. Hold for five deep breaths.



SEATED SPINAL TWIST

BENEFIT: Helps relieve tension in the spinal extensor muscles to contribute to improved posture and reduced back pain.

HOW TO PERFORM: Sit upright with feet flat on the floor. Cross your right leg over your left (if this is too deep, keep feet on the floor). Inhale, lift your arms overhead and exhale. Rotate to your right and place your hands on the outside of your chair or thigh. Hold for five breaths. Inhale, rotate to your center, switch your crossed legs and exhale, then complete the stretch on your left.

About the Author:

As Chief Science Officer at the American Council on Exercise, Cedric X. Bryant, PhD, FACSM, is a National and international lecturer, writer and member of the National Academy of Medicine's Obesity Solutions Roundtable. Bryant is also a subject-matter expert and stays at the forefront of applied physiological research, exercise training methods and health and fitness trends.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

**Through the OAC Community,
you can get access to:**

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
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