

Stretching 101

The Basics

- **Static Stretching**-Static stretches, the most familiar type, involve adopting and holding a position that stretches a muscle or group Thinkstock www.health.harvard.edu Stretching 3 of muscles. Static stretches can be active or passive. These are great to do at the end of a work day or after a good workout.
- **Ballistic Stretching**- Many people try to go deeper into a stretch by adopting a stretch position, then bouncing to quickly extend muscle length and range of motion. Stretches like these are called ballistic stretches. Ballistic stretches trigger the stretch reflex—resistance prompted by specialized nerves, forcing a lengthening muscle to contract.
- **Dynamic Stretching**- Dynamic stretches also involve movement but do not carry the same risk of injury as ballistic stretches. Dynamic stretches often mimic a sports motion, such as a golf swing. They typically take specific muscles and joints through their full range of motion, from one position to another, many times. They usually involve multiple muscle groups from various parts of the body which makes them a great warm-up for any activity

Frequency

- Healthy adults should do flexibility exercises (stretches, yoga, or tai chi) for all major muscle tendon groups—neck, shoulders, chest, trunk, lower back, hips, legs, and ankles—at least two to three times a week.
- For optimal results, spend a total of 60 seconds on each stretching exercise. So, if you can hold a particular stretch for 15 seconds, repeating it three more times would be optimal. If you can hold the stretch for 20 seconds, two more repetitions would suffice.

Simple yoga breathing

Yoga breathing, or pranayama, is relaxing and meditative. Try practicing this beginner technique so you can apply it while holding yoga poses or other stretches.

- 1 Sit or lie down comfortably, resting your hands below your navel.
- 2 Tune in to the way you breathe. Inhale and exhale naturally through your nose for a few minutes, noticing the slight rise and fall of your hand. Consider the way the air feels as it enters and exits your nostrils.
- 3 Start to count silently forward (one, two, three...), then backward (...three, two, one), as you breathe in and out.
- 4 Gradually make each exhalation twice as long as each inhalation. Focus on breathing slowly and smoothly, humming each time you exhale. The slight vibration is very soothing.

Sample Dynamic Warmup

1. Wrist Rotations:

- Stand in place, feet placed at a normal stance with arms straight at the side
- Make a fist with each hand, and rotate at the wrist, turning your fist clockwise with your left hand; and counterclockwise with your right.
- After 10-12 repetitions, reverse the rotation (i.e. counterclockwise with left, clockwise with right) and perform additional 10-12 repetitions.

2. Arm Circles

- Stand in place, feet placed about shoulder width apart with arms extended straight out to your sides
- Begin by rotating the entire arm forward in a circular fashion. Circles can be made small or large, try to find something that is right in the middle.
- After 10-12 repetitions, reverse the movement and perform circular motions going backwards.

3. Arm Swings:

- Begin in standing position, feet placed at a comfortable stance, arms placed straight at sides
- Raise both arms straight out to the sides, allowing for a natural bend at the elbow
- With arms relatively straight, now, swing both arms inward simultaneously so as to 'criss-cross' across the chest
- From the arms crossed position, extend arms back to their starting position out towards your side
- Repeat this motion for 10-12 repetitions

4. Trunk Twists:

- Stand with your feet at shoulder width and your knees slightly bent.
- Place your hands in front of you with palms facing away from you (as if you're about to push something away)
- Twist your torso from side to side while pivoting you back leg

5. Body Squat

- Stand tall with good posture holding your hands out in front of you for balance
- Now bend at the knees until your thighs are at 45° with the floor
- Keep your back long throughout the movement, and look straight ahead
- Make sure that your knees always point in the same direction as your toes
- 10-12 repetitions

6. Back Bend

- Stand with your feet at shoulder width and your knees slightly bent. Reach your arms overhead and lean slightly back until you feel an abdominal stretch.