



The Benefits of Stretching

5 stretches to add to your workout routine

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Katrina was passionate about running and trained for up to three hours every day. Unfortunately, she was prone to ankle sprains that impacted her training for months at a time.

She knew stretching was important and included it in every workout. But Katrina never really focused on her ankles until she changed schools. When her new coach added specific ankle stretches to her training, sprains became a problem of the past.

According to Jennifer Johnson, a Canadian registered physiotherapist (also called a physical therapist in the United States), “The activities you participate in should determine the kinds of stretching you do.”

Jennifer notes that daily stretching isn’t always necessary, but there are benefits to adding it to your fitness routine.

Prevent posture-related issues

Do you find yourself slouching at your desk? Do you keep your head down and shoulders forward when using your smart-phone, tablet or laptop? Stretching your upper back muscles to open up the front of your body can help you stand straighter and minimize pain in your neck and shoulders.

Improve and maintain flexibility

Can’t touch your toes anymore? It’s pretty common for girls to lose some flexibility as they head into puberty. With each growth spurt, your leg muscles might feel tight and sore. This is because your leg bones can grow quickly, while your muscles may need some time to catch up. Stretching your calves and hamstrings may help you maintain flexibility and avoid muscle tears as you participate in your favorite activities.

Protect against sports-related injuries

Stretching is more critical if you’re an athlete as it can help prevent and heal sports-related injuries. Keeping limber may even improve your performance, but you’ll want to tailor your stretches to your activities. A dancer, for example, may benefit from different stretches than a tennis player would.

If you’ve been injured or are experiencing growing pains, reach out to a licensed physical therapist. She will design a plan to specifically address your body, the activities you do and the injuries you may have sustained.

Stretch away your stress

Stretching can also be a terrific way to quiet your mind and connect with God. While you focus on specific muscles, reflect on how God created each of them to work together inside your body. Then, as you relax, thank Him for all your body can do.

Stretching can increase blood flow to your muscles, increase range of motion in your joints and help you maintain flexibility. Here are some tips to keep in mind as you move:

- Warm up your muscles for five to 10 minutes before stretching.
- Remember to breathe as you stretch.
- If stretching hurts, lessen the resistance.
- Hold each stretch for 10 to 30 seconds without bouncing.

Remember, you are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). God has created your muscles to work together as you move and grow. Enjoy adding stretches to your routine—the benefits can help you safely perform the activities you love. *8*

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Here are a few stretches to try:

Static stretches

can help to relax specific muscles and prevent injury and soreness. However, use them post-workout rather than directly before an activity as they can inhibit performance.

Dynamic stretches

are based on movement. They can work several different muscle groups to help you prepare for an activity.



Walking high-knee pull—Pull one knee to your chest. Then step forward, and pull the other knee in. Keep your back straight and your shoulders relaxed. Alternate for several steps.



Walking lunge with arm over—Step forward into a lunge. Don’t let your knee go past your ankle. At the same time, move your opposite arm by rotating it forward, up and back—creating a circular motion.



Standing hamstring stretch—Place one foot on a low stool in front of you, at about knee height. With your toes pointing up, gently lean forward. Switch legs and repeat.



Doorway pec stretch—Rest your forearms on either side of a doorway. Lean in with your chest to loosen your upper back and shoulders.



Lower back rotational stretch—To relieve lower back tension, lie on your back, with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Roll your knees to one side for several seconds. Return to center. Then roll your knees to the other side and hold.