General Tips for Stretching

Risks and safety tips

Before you start a daily stretching routine, consider any health issues you may have which could potentially cause further injury or damage and prevent you from achieving your health and wellness goals.

Stretching may not always be safe:

- **If you have an acute or existing injury**, only perform stretches recommended by your health care professional.

- **If you have a chronic or long-term injury**, consider discussing options with your specialist or physical therapist

- **If you have any physical limitations that prevent you from properly performing a stretching exercise**, then consider which stretches your body is able to perform without causing undue pain.

Get advice to avoid injury. If you have an injury or any concerns, check with your doctor, health professional or a physical therapist, who can design a stretching protocol that fits your specific recovery needs.

Tips for effectively stretching your muscles without causing injury

1. **Wear comfortable clothing** that doesn't constrict movements.

2. **Aim for 10 minutes every day.** Many of us experience somewhat stationary periods throughout the day either at work or when we are asleep, so we naturally need to warm up our bodies after remaining immobile for long periods of time. Ten minutes of daily stretching using slow easy movements can warm up the body, increase your strength, balance and flexibility.

3. **Warm up your muscles before stretching.** Muscles are not as supple when they are cold, which makes stretching more difficult and may lead to injury. If you are not exercising before your stretches, consider a gentle walk or some light cardio to warm up.

4. **Avoid bouncing.** Experts suggest you avoid bouncing which can be detrimental to your body unless your Doctor or Physical Therapist have recommended you try it. Overstretching causes muscle to contract and small tears in fibres. Move into a stretch slowly, find your balance or focal point and remain steady.

5. **Hold a sustained stretch for 10 to 30 seconds.** It needs to be long enough to adequately lengthen the muscle and improve your range of motion. A muscle usually reaches maximum elongation after about four repetitions.

6. **Don't stretch beyond the point of comfort.** Stretching should never be painful, so if it hurts, you are pushing yourself too hard. Monitor how your muscles feel as you stretch. While it's normal to feel some tension, don't push yourself past the edge of discomfort. Just adjust your stretch accordingly - when you begin to feel comfortable stretching, deepen your stretch, but If the area you are stretching starts to hurt, ease off until you don't feel any discomfort.

7. **Just Breathe.** Make sure you are comfortable and your mind focuses on your task at hand. One of the main benefits of stretching is its ability to help the mind and body relax. Therefore, try to breathe normally and make sure you don't hold your breath. As you deepen your stretch, make sure to inhale and exhale slowly. Any abrupt, fast breathing or lack of breathing can cause tension in your body and increase your risk of injury.