

Be Well Aware – Health Article



Dynamic vs. Static Stretching – What’s the Difference?

Purpose of Stretching

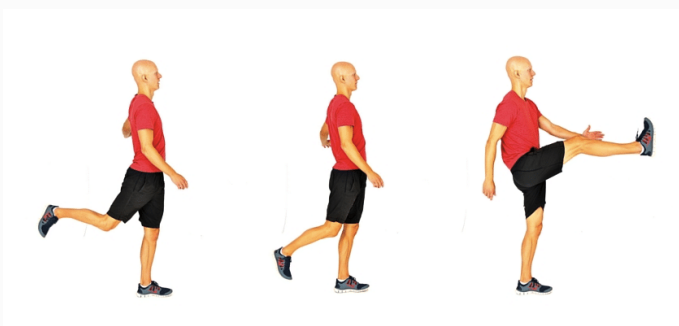
When you’re in a hurry to get your workout done, you may be tempted to skip stretching. However, having a consistent stretching routine is vital to our overall health and well-being. Not only does stretching before and after exercise help us prepare for and recover from physical activity, but it can also help us improve our *flexibility* (the range of motion available to our joints). Having tight, stiff, inflexible muscles can not only make us more prone to injury during exercise, but it can also have an adverse affect on our posture and be the cause of some common types of pain, such as lower back pain.

Types of Stretching

Did you know that the two main types of stretching each have an important place in our fitness routine? *Dynamic stretches* are active movements where our joints and muscles move through their full range of motion. These stretches can be used to help warm up your muscles before exercising. *Static stretches*, on the other hand, are held in a single position for a period of time and should be performed in the cool-down portion of your workout. Stretching regularly will help our bodies perform better.

Dynamic Stretching

Dynamic stretches should be used to help prepare your muscles for exercise. These movements help increase your body temperature and blood flow to the muscles, which can prevent injury. Dynamic stretches may mimic the actions of the activity or sport you’re about to perform. For example, a swimmer may circle their arms before getting into the water. Other examples of dynamic stretches include arm circles, leg swings, and lunge with a twist.



Make sure you are performing dynamic stretches prior to:

- Sports and athletics
- Weightlifting
- Cardiovascular exercise

Examples of Dynamic Stretches

- **Arm circles:** Let your arms drape to your sides and rotate them in circles, either forward or backward, gradually lengthening the circle.
- **Leg swings:** Face a wall, using it for support as you stand on one leg. Gently swing the opposite leg side-to-side to a gradually increasing height.
- **Lunge with a twist:** Standing, take a step forward with your right foot and reach your left hand across your body toward the ground. Return to starting position and do the same with the other side.

Static Stretching

Static stretching should be done at the end of your workout and can make a difference in how well your muscles recover after exercise. Static stretches give your muscles a chance to loosen up. Not sure where to start? Try shoulder stretches, side bends, and hamstring stretches after your next workout!

Examples of Static Stretches

- **Shoulder stretch:** Hold your left arm straight in front at shoulder level. Move your hand to the right while reaching under your arm with your right hand and securing your left shoulder. Pull the shoulder to the right to follow the momentum of your left hand. Repeat with the opposite arm.
- **Side bends:** Stand with your arms raised straight over your head. Bend to the right, keeping your arms straight, and then repeat to the left.

- **Hamstring stretch:** Sit on the ground with one leg straight out and the other bent so the bottom of your foot touches the opposite knee. Reach toward the foot of the leg that is held straight. Repeat with the opposite leg.



Benefits of Stretching

- **Greater flexibility and range of motion:** This can help you move with more comfort and ease.
- **Less pain and stiffness:** Tight, overworked muscles can cause pain and discomfort. Static stretches are an effective way to reduce this pain.
- **Decreased stress:** Combine your stretches with some mindful breathing exercises and you've got a clearer brain!
- **Improved performance:** Boosting the flexibility of your muscles can enhance your agility, speed, and muscle strength. All of these can contribute to performing at a higher level.

So, what are you waiting for? Start including stretches in your normal routine and reap the benefits!

References:

- https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-importance-of-stretching>
- <https://www.uwhealth.org/health-wellness/dynamic-stretching-versus-static-stretching/47947>