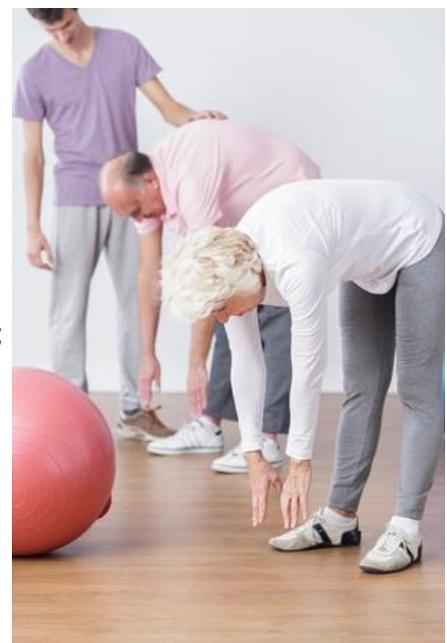


Stretching... The basics and why practitioners love stretching so much!



Without regular stretching muscles tend to lose flexibility, so when they're called upon to perform a certain movement it can result in damage to the muscular tissue (tendons and/or muscle belly). Sports, work related activities, daily chores and even sleeping require the recruitment of muscles and therefore, this recruitment can all lead to muscle tightness and shortening. Proper stretching even for short periods each day can help to:

- Prevent injuries;
- Improve efficiency of the muscles;
- Increase extensibility of muscles;
- Improve co-ordination between muscle groups;
- Relax the muscle and help reduce pain; and
- Decrease muscle tightening after activity.



RULES FOR STRETCHING

Keep the following rules in mind before attempting any stretching exercises.

1. **Warm up prior to stretching** – a small amount of physical activity, or better still a hot bath or shower, prior to stretching helps to loosen the muscles and make stretching more effective and comfortable.
2. **Stretch gently and slowly** – stretch only so far as you do not feel pain. You should feel a very slight pull through the muscle, but no pain. Hold your stretch for at least *30 seconds* – the tension should subside as the stretch is held. Breathe slowly and deeply and concentrate on relaxing the area being stretched.
3. **Avoid ballistic or bouncy stretching** – it's not the 80's anymore and we now know bouncing into a stretch can be dangerous. Keep movements smooth and return to you starting position slowly.



GETTING INTO AND MAINTAINING A GOOD STRETCHING ROUTINE

Make sure you're doing the stretches correctly to prevent causing injury. Get direction from your Osteopath, Myotherapist or a trainer and ask how they can help you work out a routine to best suit your lifestyle. Maybe you need to stretch daily, or if your neck is sore from working at a computer, you'll probably benefit from stretching regularly throughout the day.

- Make sure the set of stretches you're doing best suit your specific needs or problem.

Do each stretch a few times and as you become more flexible you can increase the length and duration of stretch.

- Practice regularly until you build your stretches up to being held for 30 seconds.
- Stretching in front of a mirror can sometimes be helpful to view your technique. Stretch both sides (where applicable) to keep things even.
- If the stretch is causing you pain, rather than a tension stretch sensation, STOP and seek advice on modifying the stretch.
- Don't force yourself into a difficult stretch and remember to keep your movements smooth and avoid jerky movements or 'bouncing' the stretch.
- Keep a regular breathing rhythm while stretching and never hold your breath while trying to perform a stretch.