

How to Stretch

There are several defined ways to stretch and move. Static stretching involves stretching to a point and holding the stretch for a defined period of time. Dynamic stretching is controlled, smooth, and deliberate movement through a range of motion. Ballistic stretching involves faster, even explosive motion and is more difficult to control. One can also view types of stretching through a continuum of movement model.

On one end of the spectrum is static stretching, next is dynamic stretching, and at the other end of the spectrum is ballistic stretching. I recommend and prefer movement mostly in the dynamic range. I find it most useful for functional activities. Static stretching can be beneficial for flexibility enhancement over time, but in some instances can impede peak performance, especially if performed prior to an activity. Ballistic stretching done properly can produce benefits, but the risk of injury is higher, more skill and self-awareness is involved, and proper technique is critical. For the purpose of this tutorial we will present instruction that relates to dynamic movement with an emphasis on fully exploring one's active range of motion. Another key point here is the word "active". This means a person does the stretch themselves under their own muscle power. Passive stretching is another technique, but this involves the assistance of a trained partner and will not be addressed here.

Breathing

Breathing is an important and often overlooked component of movement. How we breathe can either enhance or impede our ability to move optimally. Try to do the following as you move...

Breathe in a relaxed fashion in and out through the nose. Let the abdomen gently expand on the inhale and the chest naturally expand as the lungs fill with air. Inhaling occurs when the diaphragm actively contracts, creating a negative pressure inside our lungs. Exhaling is a passive process where the diaphragm relaxes. It is a natural process. Don't force it.

Focus

Put your attention on what you are doing. For example, if you are stretching the muscles on the left side of your neck, feel what those muscles are telling you about the extent of the stretch, the comfort or lack thereof, and focus on performing a proper movement.

Conclusion

Remember...Stretching and dynamic movement should always feel sound, stable, and comfortable. It should never hurt. If you are injured some stretching may not be appropriate at certain times. If you are not injured and experience difficulty, you are most likely doing something incorrectly. Seek assistance should that occur.