



### Stretching

**Fact:**

Stretching does much more than increase flexibility.

**Fiction:**

It's a myth that people should "feel the burn" while stretching.

Stretching burns calories, strengthens muscles and bones, prevents cramps, stiffness and injury and maintains the amount of movement a joint and muscle have.

### Understanding Stretching

Stretching is extending a muscle to the point of tension, but not pain.\* Avoid stretching during the warm-up before exercise because it can injure cold muscles. Stretching is best for the cool-down period after exercise. During cool-down, stretch the muscles that were used. A jogger or biker might stretch hamstrings, calves, groin and quadriceps, while swimmers would stretch muscles in the groin, shoulders and back.

Yoga and tai chi promote flexibility, balance, proper breathing, lower stress levels and lower blood pressure, and may even reduce cholesterol levels when done for at least 10 to 12 minutes at least three times a week.\*

To stretch, exhale and extend the muscles to the point of tension, not pain, and hold the position for 20 to 60 seconds and breathe. Inhale when returning to a relaxed position. Begin with 5 to 10 repetitions. When on one's back, the back should be relaxed with the lower back flush with the mat. Work only the muscles needed to change position, such as the abdomen.

It's never too late to start stretching. Stretching has even helped nursing home patients grow muscle and reduce stiffness and loss of balance.

\* IntelliHealth