

Stretching

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“Is stretching good or bad?” is the wrong question to ask. Stretching is a **powerful tool** in your arsenal, use it wisely. Your relationship with and understanding of your body is key.

Your individual body mechanics are what is important:

- **Overstretching and excessive flexibility offers no protective benefit**
- Muscle elasticity is important to absorb and transmit forces, and to protect joint mechanics. The right amount of muscle “tightness” improves force generation, stabilizes joints, and the “spring” increases endurance by decreasing the energy requirements of running.
- Muscles that are too tight, especially from prolonged sitting or inactivity, can cause injury by altering your joint mechanics, impairing your posture, forcing other muscles to work harder, and creating areas of friction. Stretching is important, but is only needed when muscles are too tight and then only to the point of optimum flexibility.
- Some stretches actually can cause injury. One example is the common hamstring stretch that strains both the sciatic nerve and lumbar discs.
- Adequate flexibility is important in both dynamic and passive situations.
 - **A dynamically flexible muscle will allow you to respond to unexpected terrain changes or obstacles without straining a muscle or joint.**
 - **A passively flexible muscle allows full joint movement, optimal posture, and decreases the workload of its antagonistic muscle.**

Some interesting for athletes and those living an active lifestyle.

- On military recruits, the **most frequently injured were the most and least flexible.**
- In college athletes, **frequent stretching did not correlate with fewer injuries.**

People beginning new activities, increasing activity levels, or who have sedentary (sitting) jobs are at greatest risk of a specific muscle flexibility-related injury. Start by seeing your physical therapist for proper stretching techniques, when to stretch and how many reps.

Warning: Only do these stretches if they are pain-free. Start gently. Good form is important to target the correct structures.