



Senior Series

*The Ohio
Department of
Aging*



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Stretching and Flexibility as We Age

The phrase “range of motion” means the flexibility of a joint. The structures of joint and muscle tissue are elastic. As we grow older, the tissues around our joints tend to thicken. Steps should be taken to prevent them from growing tighter and more restricted. Stretching helps combat these tendencies.

How Hard?

There should be nothing hard about your stretching. This is a time to relax and enjoy! Each stretch should cause your muscle to feel comfortably stretched but not distressed. Never force any stretch and never try to stretch so far that you experience pain. Pain is a four-letter word for “stop”! When you stretch, allow the muscle to feel just slightly uncomfortable. With practice and patience, flexibility will increase.

How Long?

Taking your time, gently ease into each stretch. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Perform the stretch three times, taking

a moment to rest between repetitions. Always be aware of your breathing. Don't hold your breath. Breathe naturally during each stretch.

How Often?

To preserve your current level of flexibility, perform your stretch routine three times a week. To increase flexibility, stretch 4 or 5 days per week. A stretch and exercise program aimed at limbering the entire body will be most beneficial.

Gentleness while stretching is a must for older adults with back problems, arthritis, osteoporosis, or any condition likely to decrease the natural range of motion. Physical limitations must be respected. The use of towels or other assistive devices during stretch programs will help increase range of motion.

People with any type of medical disorder should consult with their physicians prior to physical exercise and stretching for flexibility.

Let's look at some rules to follow for safe and successful stretching:

- If any stretch hurts or feels abnormal to you, omit it from your regimen.
- Never bounce during any stretch. Ease into the position and hold it in a relaxed manner.
- Do not force your joint to stretch beyond its natural range of motion.
- Always breathe; never hold your breath!
- Before stretching, perform a thorough warm-up lasting 10-15 minutes. No cool-down period is required after stretching.
- Perform at least one stretch for each body section.
- Never include controversial stretches, such as: the “hurdler’s stretch” or the “plow.”

It may be advantageous to select some beautiful, relaxing music that encourages a sense of quiet harmony while stretching. Choose music that creates an atmosphere of tranquility and peacefulness. Never hurry—just slow down and enjoy the moment. Stretch smoothly and breathe deeply. Relax and feel proud of yourself for taking care of your body, for you are a true miracle!

Reference

Clark, Janie (1992). *Full Life Fitness: A Complete Exercise Program for Mature Adults*, Chapter 6. Human Kinetics Publishers.

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