



Newsletter

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 8

May 21, 2008

Welcome to the BFit4Life Bi-Monthly newsletter



Hiya All,

In order to keep progressing, we sometimes have to stock of our current position. We may have to take a step backwards in order to take two steps forward. If you embark on an exercise regime you may have to wipe away the cobwebs, and one of those cobwebs may be flexibility. It is a hard cross to bear for some when they want to stretch the legs, but while the mind may be willing, the body may not. We are only as strong and our weakest link and if your weakest link is flexibility you may have to expose it in order to unhinge the breaks that limit you achieving your goals. If this means sacrificing short term pain for long term gain so be it.

"We can't hit stop speed in your body if we have the handbrake up."

Stretch to Win

As the years roll in, our faces may age but one thing that can have a detrimental effect on our appearance is gravity. Compression on our bodies during our 16 hour days begins to make our body similar to the Leaning Tower of Piza. So, whether you are a serious athlete or a couch potato, everybody can benefit from stretching to help prevent this happening. We don't need to reach the flexibility of a gymnast but an emphasis on stretching will lead to an improved appearance and performance in our daily routines. The problem exists not only with gravity but that people tend to migrate towards what we are good at. If you are flexible you won't mind stretching, but if you aren't flexible you won't want to expose your weakness, the thoughts alone are enough to make you break into a cold sweat. Poor flexibility and posture can increase your future likelihood of injuries and back pain. And, people that do stretch usually do so ineffectively, performing the same old-school stretching exercises that several generations of coaches and athletes have used. These normally involve holding the familiar positions to stretch the groin, hips and the hamstrings on the back of the leg etc at the same intensity and duration regardless of what sport or activity you have been engaging in.



Poor flexibility and posture can increase your future likelihood of injuries and back pain

There are many other people who spend most of their day sitting – on the job, in the car, at the dinner table – only to spend their evening watching TV. Sitting for extended periods day in and day out, without adequate stretching and movement, will lead to decreased flexibility and muscle imbalances. These day to day activities of TV soap watching lead to the Quasimodo like posture of some of the elderly as years of TV watching in a couch can cause muscle imbalances where certain muscles on the front on the body become short while the muscles on the back of the body become overstretched. These muscle imbalances will lead to poor posture placing abnormal weight on joints, stressing muscles and tendons, often leading to pain. This is similar to your car wearing away when the tracking on your wheels are not aligned. Success coach Jack Canfield uses a formula where E- (Event) + R (Response) = O (Outcome). The event in this case is sitting down in a chair for long periods, the response is to not stretch and allow our muscles to become tight and the outcome is that we will reduce our flexibility and increase our likelihood to get injured.

Stretch to Win continued

To better understand how muscle imbalances affect your body, think of a bicycle wheel. If a bicycle wheel is out of balance or buckled and you take it out for a ride, chances are the bicycle won't handle well. The stress of riding on a crooked wheel could cause the wheel to fall apart. The solution is to shorten/tighten the loose spokes and lengthen/loosen the tight ones. If we loosen already loose spokes, the bike becomes more unstable. In order to determine which muscles are tight it is advised to get a personalised flexibility assessment from a qualified fitness professional or a body-work therapist. Research has shown an overhead squat to be an excellent resource for determining overall flexibility and your future likelihood of injuries.



Once we know the tight muscles to be stretched we must use the kind of stretching to improve our flexibility. There are two main kinds of stretching, PNF- (contract relax or also called proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation- of which there are 16 families) and ballistic stretching popularised by gymnasts. Throughout the years, I have practiced many different types of stretching and I have found that in order to improve your flexibility, it takes six hours a week for circa 12 weeks to have a long-lasting effect. You can maintain flexibility with warm-up stretching but you won't increase it.

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The problem people find with increasing their flexibility is boredom. Stretching is not the most exciting past-time especially for athletes but it is a necessity and so here are some of the elements that form the foundation of Anne and Chris Fredericks system in their book "Stretch to Win".

- ★ Synchronise breathing and movement. When you learn to relax your breathing you can release tension in your muscles drawing awareness to tight muscles until they release rather than just counting numbers.
- ★ Tune your nervous system. When you are warming up for matches or training your stretching should be dynamic with movement increasing blood flow to the muscles, increasing alertness while post training and cool-down stretching is best performed six hours after an event at a slower pace.
- ★ Follow a logical Anatomical order. Stretch the joint before the deeper muscles that are close to the joint to increase functional flexibility and this leads to increased flexibility of superficial muscles that cross two or more joints.
- ★ In stretching, it is not wise to follow a No Pain, No gain approach. The rebound effect of stretching is the pain you experience when you come out of a stretch. To avoid this you should come out of the stretch a different way than you entered it to stop the muscle re-contracting into its previous position.
- ★ Stretch Fascia, Not Just Muscle. The human muscles are enveloped by a connective tissue called fascia that connects each muscle together like a spider's web. If the calf muscle gets tight, it can pull directly on the muscle above it the hamstrings which can pull on your low back. As such the body should be stretched as a unit.
- ★ Stretch the muscles at different angles to achieve improve your flexibility.
- ★ Target the Entire Joint. Stretch the Joint capsule to prevent hip injuries like bursitis.
- ★ Use Traction. When you traction a joint before stretching it creates space for the joint to move, it reduces compression on the joint and it frees up space for the muscle to move.
- ★ Adjust stretching to your goals. Consider the factors of intensity, duration and range of movement to get the most of flexibility per stretch.

Stretch to Win continued

There are different types of stretching and it is important you pick the right stretch for the task you are trying to achieve. Prior to training, research shows that if you conduct passive stretching, you switch off receptors that protect the joint, make your muscles weaker and increase your likelihood of injury. A contract relax PNF stretch is more appropriate and no stretch should last longer than 15 seconds. When you hold stretches for longer than this period, it restricts oxygen to the muscle and increases the likelihood of the body laying down new scar tissue which in turn will restrict movement.

It is important to stretch whether you are an elite athlete or an office worker. The benefits are like an investment. By performing the stretches you are removing the breaks that restrict your movements, your performance and from keeping your head in the clouds. Invest the time and you can stretch to win.

Overhead Squat Test

One of the most effective and efficient tests of flexibility is the overhead squat. Different studies proved that your inability to perform an overhead squat increased your likelihood of injuries as it tests your flexibility at a number of your joints from your ankles to your shoulders. Your competency in performing the test is rated with 10 being the highest. The less flexible you are will be rated on the lower end of the scales and this might be your wake up call to prioritise your flexibility to prevent future injuries. The more sports and activities you have performed in the past and didn't stretch, you will increase your likelihood of you struggling in this test.

Tips to Perform the Overhead Squat Test

- ✚ Stand with your feet hip distance apart and place your hands above your head.
- ✚ Keeping your heels on the ground and your hands overhead, bend your knees until you are at the bottom of the squat.
- ✚ If you are struggling to reach the bottom of the squat remaining upright you're body is giving you hints into what muscles are tight. E.g. if you struggle to break parallel in the squat you're deep hip rotators and you're gluts may be the cause of this.
- ✚ By stretching the muscles you perceive to be tight and retesting yourself you are gaining the information needed to continually improve your flexibility.
- ✚ If you have been performing partial range movements in the gym, you will shorten the muscles as they never get fully stretched and long-term it will cause muscle imbalances.
- ✚ Muscle balances can restrict a joint and a restricted joint can cause inflammation. "It is" is referred to as inflammation and arthritis is inflammation of the joints. By eating well, training well and adopting a personalised flexibility program giving by a qualified trainer you can get the most out of your sports and make sure that back pain does not become an ailment in your life.



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