

# The Benefits of Performing Regular Stretching Exercises

**Mark Orstad, PT**  
**Physical Therapist**  
**Ham Lake Physical Therapy**

When people talk about flexibility and stretching we often think about stretching before sports activities. Yes, stretching exercises before participating in sports activities is important to avoid injury, but a regular daily stretching program has many other benefits.

A regular stretching routine helps improve flexibility. Flexibility can be defined as the ability of a joint to move through a range of motion. How much movement a joint has depends greatly on the tightness of the muscles, tendons, and ligaments that are attached to the joint. For instance, how far a person can bend their knee depends on the tightness of tissues around the joint. Flexibility around a joint is important for maintaining joint health and preventing injuries.

Even if someone has not performed stretching exercises for years it's not too late, because flexibility is a highly adaptable physical fitness component. By stretching on a regular basis flexibility can improve.

Here are some of the benefits of performing a consistent stretching program. Good flexibility is important for maintaining health of the joints in the body. If muscles are tight they can cause abnormal stresses on a joint. For example, tight thigh muscles can cause abnormal strain on the kneecap leading to knee pain. Maintaining flexibility can help prevent injuries. If muscles are stretched and exercised on a regular basis they can react better if forced to react quickly. For instance, if someone slips on a patch of ice, a muscle or joint with good flexibility may react to avoid injury such as a pulled muscle.

Other benefits of stretching exercises include reducing muscle soreness after activity and exercise. Stretching exercises can also help reduce aches or pains from prolonged activities such as riding in the car for a long time. Finally, taking time to perform a regular stretching routine can help with relaxation. By taking time to stretch people can incorporate breathing exercises to help reduce everyday stress.

If you are a beginner or haven't performed stretching exercises for awhile, here are some tips for safe stretching. Perform stretches in a pain free manner. You should feel the muscle stretch, but it should not be painful. To get the best benefit from stretching exercises you should hold the stretch for 20-30 seconds at a time. Remember flexibility will not improve overnight, so it is important to stretch on a regular basis to achieve the best results. If you have any questions about starting a stretching program, contact your physician or a physical therapist.