

Hang Loose and Stretch

You probably already know how important stretching is for preventing injuries and increasing your flexibility. Here are a few pointers.

Do a short 10 minute warm up (like walking) before you stretch. Your body responds the best when the muscles are warm with good blood flow. Begin your stretch by gradually moving into position. Sudden, jerky movements put your body on the defensive, causing it to tighten up and resist. Hold onto or lean on something solid and make certain that you feel stable, and can easily keep your balance without teetering.

Remember not to hold your breath! Be sure to breathe slowly and deeply into the stretch. When you have reached your full stretch, hold it for 30 seconds. This is longer than you think. Your body's "stretch reflex" resists the stretch for the first 15 seconds until it's sure you're not going to get injured. Once this releases, your real stretching actually begins and you'll find that you can easily go further. Also, make sure not to bounce. When you do, you continually activate the stretch reflex so your muscles can't relax. You shouldn't feel pain while stretching. If you do, back off a little until the pain goes away.

There are a lot of stretches and choosing the best one depends on the exercise or sport you are playing. Pick up a stretching book or chart and ask one of the trainers or instructors for suggestions. Also, I highly recommend the yoga classes for a great stretch (and a great workout).

Yours in health,

Dr. Rick

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