



TO STRETCH OR NOT TO STRETCH THAT IS THE QUESTION

We're always told make sure to stretch!
But, is that really so? Well, no.

It is true that keeping flexible is important, but not all body parts are equal. The lower spine/ lower back forms the back part of the body's core. The ability to keep that braced or rigid is important for our strength. A flexible spine is not always a happy or strong spine.

Stretching is not a warm up! The muscles need blood circulation and need to be warmed up to be able to lengthen without suffering damage. Stretching the arms to the sky when you wake up is fine but leave a full body stretching routine until a little later.

Old school 'stand to touch the toes' with straight legs is ill advised first thing in the morning. The hamstrings may be too tight to lengthen so too much pressure is applied to the lumbar discs which is a recipe for injuring them.

When should you stretch?

It is best to stretch once your muscles are warm and have good blood circulation. This lessens the risk of 'pulling' muscle fibres to the point of injury. Some studies have also suggested that extensive stretching prior to competitive sport serves no benefit in terms of raised performance.

Stretching after your workout or game may on the other hand facilitate recovery with less stiffness and soreness the following days. The feeling of tightness after physical exercise is likely a combination of contracted muscle fibres and build up of lactic acid and other by-products post exercise.

Some people are born more flexible than others. The ratio of elastin to collagen in our connective tissues has a significant bearing on how flexible we are.





Can stretching make you more flexible?

Yes! Like a lot of things, the more we do it, the better we get. Regular good stretching may also raise our 'baseline' flexibility.

So, should I never stretch before exercise?

Never say never. For exercise that requires extreme range of motion such as: gymnastics, swimming, martial arts, racquet sports, cricket (catching in the field!) etc. yes. But gentle stretching always follows a thorough warmup.

We sometimes call this "muscle memory"; swinging a golf club before teeing off or reaching for the back hand corner of the squash court.

Stretching during your daily work day is good too especially after a bit of movement and can add quality years to your life!

If the muscles around the pelvis: glutes, hip flexors, front/back and inner thighs are too inflexible, the stress goes to the lower back.

The stress has to go somewhere. So, when the lower back feels tight, the muscles mentioned above are the ones to stretch and not the lower spine. Sitting is the root cause of this feeling of stiffness in the lower spine.

Neck tension likewise often stems from the shoulder girdle and chest. Spreading eagle in the doorway is a nice way to open the front of the chest.

Stretching correctly is a great complement to chiropractic and we will tailor-make it to your specific needs.

Book in on **9743 1336**

Helpful Hints:

- Know your level of flexibility
- Be warm before stretching
- Common confusion: Are you in fact dehydrated or stiff?
- Stretch pelvic and shoulder girdles to free up spine
- Stretching improves recovery
- Stretch always at the end of an exercise session
- Match stretching to your sport
- Straps & bands are helpful
- PNF or Proprioceptive Neuro Facilitation is great
- If it's painful it isn't stretching

