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## **BASIC STRETCHING GUIDELINES**

To help the body maintain the ability to perform normal activity there must be a proper amount of flexibility in the joints and muscles. Disease, trauma, or loss of motion in a joint can eventually cause shortening of the muscles, tendons, and joint capsule. For these reasons, stretching is an important part of any exercise routine and is best done after some form of exercise or activity when you are warmed up.

When stretching:

1. First, slowly take the muscle to a gentle pull.
2. Hold the stretch for approximately 15-30 seconds, do not bounce.
3. When the feeling of tension decreases the stretch can be taken further.
4. Rest between stretches.
5. Never try to gain too much range in one session.
6. Never stretch to the point of pain.
7. Relax and breathe regular during stretches.

Useful Hints:

1. Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
2. When stretching muscles which cross two joints, first stretch over each joint separately, then stretch both joints together.
3. Gentle, longer stretches are generally more effective.
4. Stretch the joints farthest away from the trunk first.
5. Applying heat to the joints and muscles prior to stretching may help enhance the stretch.
6. Massage and relaxation techniques may enhance stretching.
7. It may take several weeks to see results, so be patient!

### **DO NOT STRETCH IF:**

1. The joint has a bony block.
2. A fracture is present.
3. The muscle or joint is inflamed (the presence of heat or swelling).
4. The joint is excessively lax and the muscle is helping to keep the joint stable.

There are specialized techniques for stretching which your health professional may teach you if you are not seeing the proper results or have a history of recurrent injury to a specific area. Always check with your health professional if you have questions.