



How to stretch

Disclaimer: Dr R Potgieter accepts no responsibility for any injuries that may occur when doing unsupervised stretching.

By adopting a regular stretching routine, muscle tension is reduced and an increased range of motion is established. Effective stretching minimises arterial compression, due to abnormal muscle tone and normalises blood flow.

Regular stretching can minimise nerve compression and avoid neuropraxia or loss of nerve conduction. Regular stretching reduces pain by normalising muscle physiology and reducing chemical imbalances that may irritate sensory and motor nerve endings, thereby causing pain referral patterns.



The Rules:

The targeted muscle must be completely relaxed and then firmly, slowly and carefully stretched to a point of moderate pain, gradually restoring its full normal length.

Maintain the stretch for a minimum of 30 seconds and repeat 3-4 times with a moderate rest period in between stretching.

Painful muscles cannot be effectively stretched if they are not fully relaxed and full relaxation requires a comfortable warm and relaxing environment. Create this conducive environment to improve the quality of your stretching routine as well as to facilitate a de-stressing effect.

Don't forget to breathe. Relaxation isn't a passive process but an active one that requires learning how to turn off motion until activity.

Stabilise your position before you stretch. Ensure the table, bed, chair provide adequate support and anchor for the opposite side of your body being stretched to your support structure, e.g. hold on to bottom of chair.

Constantly compare paired muscle tone (stiffness) on opposite sides of the body and target the individual muscle or muscle group that is more stiff or provides greater resistance against the stretching routine. Aim to equalise muscle tone.

After you are fully and completely stretched the return to neutral must be smooth and gradual. Take your time, be patient – Relax. Repeat!

General soreness after a stretching routine can be remarkably reduced by applying moist heat to the target muscle for a few minutes, post exercise. Try relaxing muscle in a hot bath or shower with the water pressure directed onto the sore muscle.

Do not over exert yourself after the stretching regime. Avoid strenuous work or sporting activities for at least 3-4 hours after the stretching routine.

Stretching does relieve stress and tension. Even if no specific pain is being experienced, consider using a stretching routine for your general well-being.