

Stretches: the forgotten exercise

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(HealthDay)—Along with aerobic and strength training, stretching is an important part of every workout routine. But many people make the mistake of skipping this key step or doing certain stretches at the wrong

time.

Stretching improves flexibility and helps maintain good range of motion in your joints. It may even prevent injury. Timing is important, though.

Starting your [workout](#) with dynamic stretches can prep your body for the [exercise](#) to come, according to the American Council on Exercise (ACE). These are stretches that take your body through a range of motions and raise your core temperature.

On the other hand, static stretches—stretches you get into and hold for a certain length of time without moving—before exercise can strain or pull a muscle. So, save such stretches for after your workout when your muscles are warm and loose, the ACE says.

It's important to keep safety in mind when you're doing static [stretches](#) in particular. Ease into each stretch and move slowly until you feel the targeted muscle or muscles gently extend. Try to hold each position for 10 to 30 seconds. Relax and then repeat the stretch two or three times. Breathe slowly and naturally.

Be sure to stretch the muscles on both sides of your body. If you stretch one hamstring, don't forget to do the other. And to avoid tearing a muscle don't bounce.

Remember to listen to your body as you stretch. If a particular move causes a [muscle](#) cramp or pain of any kind, stop doing it.

More information: To find out more about the benefits of stretching, read the American Council on Exercise's list of [Top Ten Reasons to Stretch](#).

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