



The Importance of Stretching

Introduction:

Frequent stretching keeps a proper blood and nutrient supply to the working muscles and tissues throughout the workday. Stretching also helps prevent fatigue and discomfort and can also decrease the risk of musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) injuries while reducing stress and increasing energy.

Pre-work Stretching Suggestions:

A person should stretch only after warming up, when the muscles are warm and less likely to tear. The most effective method of warming up is slowly going through the actual motions of the exercise of work to be performed at a relaxed pace for 3 to 10 minutes. A person should then stretch after warming up or exercising, and each stretch should be comfortable enough to hold for a count of ten. Stretching lengthens muscles and tendons and allows longer muscles to generate more force around the joints, contract more efficiently, and perform better. Stretching should be performed for at least 5-10 minutes prior to work. To make this time truly effective follow these tips:

Back: Back injuries are one of the most common injury in any type of manual labor industry, or any job that requires frequent maneuvering and heavy lifting of objects. This is why traditionally people will “over-work” their back. It is recommended to take 1-2 minutes to stretch your back.

- Bend slowly, side to side (20-30 seconds).
- Place your hands on your lower back, bend your neck back and arch your back (20-30 seconds).
- Place your legs together and slowly bend down and try to touch your toes (hold for 20 seconds).
- Slowly twist your torso and upper body side to side (20-30 seconds).

Legs/Knees: Legs and knees are under a great deal of stress from carrying heavy loads, squatting, repetitive kneeling, etc. It is recommended to stretch your legs and knees for at least 1-2 minutes.

- Stand on one leg, reach behind your back and pull your foot up and forward (20-30 seconds, each leg).
- Spread your legs and bend down and try to touch the ground (20-30 seconds).

Shoulders: Shoulders get tired and achy and can be a nagging injury that will plague you for many years to come. It is recommended to at least stretch your shoulders for 1-2 minutes.

- Extend your arms and make large, slow circular motions with your arm. First forward, then backwards (20-30 seconds, each arm).
- Grab the opposite elbow and pull elbow across your body to stretch your shoulder muscles (20-30 seconds, each arm).

Neck: The neck muscles get extremely fatigued and sore, especially when working in cramped spaces or working in a position that requires you to look at an upward angle. It is recommended to stretch your neck for at least 1-2 minutes.

- Make a slow circular motion by rotating your head, first clockwise, then counterclockwise (20-30 seconds, each direction).
- Place your hand on one side of your head and use your neck muscles to push against your hand, then switch and push from the other direction (20-30 seconds, each direction).

Conclusion:

A regular program of exercise will help to strengthen muscles which will help prevent muscle strains and soreness. Alternating exercises or work tasks on a daily basis will allow muscles to recover, prevent injuries, and promote a higher level of fitness. Always consult your doctor before beginning a program of exercise.