

Fitness Homework – Benefits of Flexibility Training

Benefits of Flexibility Training

Flexibility is a joint's ability to move through a full range of motion. Flexibility training (stretching) helps balance muscle groups that might be overused during exercise or physical activity or as a result of bad posture. It's important to clearly understand the many benefits that result from a good flexibility program.

Improved Physical Performance and Decreased Risk of Injury

First, a safe and effective flexibility training program increases physical performance. A flexible joint has the ability to move through a greater range of motion and requires less energy to do so, while greatly decreasing your risk of injury. Most professionals agree that stretching decreases resistance in tissue structures; you are, therefore, less likely to become injured by exceeding tissue extensibility (maximum range of tissues) during activity.

Reduced Muscle Soreness and Improved Posture

Recent studies show that slow, static stretching helps reduce muscle soreness after exercise. Static stretching involves a slow, gradual and controlled elongation of the muscle through the full range of motion and held for 15-30 seconds in the furthest comfortable position (without pain). Stretching also improves muscular balance and posture. Many people's soft-tissue structures has adapted poorly to either the effects of gravity or poor postural habits. Stretching can help realign soft tissue structures, thus reducing the effort it takes to achieve and maintain good posture in the activities of daily living.

Reduced Risk of Low Back Pain

A key benefit, and one I wish more people would realize, is that stretching reduces the risk of low back pain. Stretching promotes muscular relaxation. A muscle in constant contraction requires more energy to accomplish activities. Flexibility in the hamstrings, hip flexors, quadriceps, and other muscles attaching to the pelvis reduces stress to the low back. Stretching causes muscular relaxation, which encourages healthy nutrition directly to muscles; the resulting reduction in accumulated toxins reduces the potential for muscle shortening or tightening and thus reduces fatigue.

Increased Blood and Nutrients to Tissues

Another great benefit is that stretching increases blood supply and nutrients to joint structures. Stretching increases tissue temperature, which in turn increases circulation and nutrient transport. This allows greater elasticity of surrounding tissues and increases performance. Stretching also increases joint synovial fluid, which is a lubricating fluid that promotes the transport of more nutrients to the joints' articular cartilage. This allows a greater range of motion and reduces joint degeneration.

Improved Muscle Coordination

Another little-known benefit is increased neuromuscular coordination. Studies show that nerve-impulse velocity (the time it takes an impulse to travel to the brain and back) is improved with stretching. This helps opposing muscle groups work in a more synergistic, coordinated fashion.

Enhanced Enjoyment of Physical Activities

