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Stretching Before Exercise: Should You Bother?



To stretch or not to stretch? That is the question. Since the 1970s, everyone from Little League coaches to professional trainers has promoted the benefits of stretching as a warm-up before exercise.

Recent research has produced evidence that **static stretching before exercise does nothing to prevent injury** and may be disadvantageous to performance. This is not to say that athletes should not warm up.

There is general agreement that increasing blood flow and body temperature before significant exercise is important. Now the question is whether static stretching is the best way to do this.

Stretching elongates muscles. In static stretching, the muscle is slowly elongated and then held at full extension for up to 30 seconds. This increases range of motion, which in turn increases flexibility. The assumption has been that increased flexibility translates into fewer injuries and improved performance. However, a 2004 American College of Sports Medicine review of the medical literature on stretching concluded that **stretching was not associated with a significant reduction in injuries**, although there was not enough evidence to endorse discontinuing the practice.

More recently, some studies have suggested that static stretching before exercise can cause minute tears in muscle fibers that ultimately decrease performance. In addition, stretching has been shown not to significantly decrease post-exercise muscle soreness. Those advocating against static stretching suggest instead that exercisers should increase circulation and body temperature by **beginning whatever exercise they intend to perform slowly** and then gradually move on to increasingly intense exercise. Runners, for example, should warm up with light jogging. Kettlebell users should begin with easy, controlled swings and a light load.

To stretch or not to stretch? Talk with us about the kind of activities you perform, your performance level and your workout routine. By keeping up with the latest medical findings, we can apply them to your individual situation and develop a program that is right for you.