

True Secrets of Extreme Flexibility

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Introduction

In this report, we are going to assume that you already have some knowledge or a regular routine that involves stretching positions. If not, then just about any stretching book can provide you with the body positions required to stretch specific muscle groups. Since most visitors to this site are typically internal and external martial artists, we have found it redundant to provide and illustrate stretching postures.

This information is focused on the actual techniques and methods needed to achieve VERY HIGH LEVELS of FLEXIBILITY! Also, we will provide a guideline of how often you should stretch and what type of stretching you should do and specifically when you should do it. If your aim is to achieve the splits, Chinese or American style, then you should always stretch your neck muscles and calf muscles in all of your training routines. DO NOT neglect these areas, or you will never achieve your goal.

Dynamic Stretching

This type of stretching should be performed prior to actual training. Most people warm up with Static relaxed stretching before training or competition, which is completely WRONG! Relaxed stretching is best performed after training not before.

Dynamic Stretching trains and prepares the muscles to perform in a manner that is similar to the upcoming task. For example, a golfer should warm up by actually picking up a golf club and start swinging the club and twisting his hips just as he would as if he was going to hit a ball. He would start slowly at first gradually building momentum and increasing the range of motion to full performance.

A martial artist who is preparing to kick should perform, front stretch kicks, side stretch kicks and back stretch kicks. These are all done stiff legged for those who are unfamiliar with the technique or call them by a different name. Again start slowly at first, gradually building momentum and increasing the range of motion.

Next, you should begin kicking a heavy bag with all of the kicking techniques that you perform. Start with low kicks using a low level of power and gradually kick harder each time. Then continue with the same kick and raise the height requirement. Again, start with a low level of kicking power and gradually increase to a much harder kick.

Continue this process of gradually raising the minimum height requirement until you reach your current maximum performance level. Repeat this basic process with every type of kick you use in your style of martial arts training. Don't forget to include spinning kicks and jumping kicks if you are going to perform them in the upcoming event or class session.

You should NEVER perform any type of classical/traditional “warm up” stretching before class or competition. You must train your body to perform on demand. After one month of Dynamic Stretching, you will probably be able to kick at your prior maximum level cold, without any type of warm-up routine.

After all, if someone attacks you in a real life situation, they are not going to let you perform warm-up stretches before tangling with you. This type of workout also strengthens the individual muscle groups for the specific task at hand, which is extremely important for preventing injuries. This secret alone is worth its weight in gold. If this is the only thing you get out of the entire article, it is enough to improve your level of performance all by itself.

Relaxed Stretching

This is the type of stretching that most everyone is familiar with. The problem is that it is used incorrectly. Relaxed stretching should be performed after a workout or training session when class or competition has finished.

The reason relaxed stretching should NEVER be performed before training is because it will increase your range of motion, but it does nothing to strengthen the muscles used in the motion. This is exactly how you end up with muscle tears. The body’s tendons are ready, but the muscles involved are just too weak for the required action.

You should never be in a hurry to perform this type of stretching, so plenty of time must be allotted in your schedule. It is important to stretch the muscles until they are slightly uncomfortable, and then PATIENTLY wait until the muscles RELAX and become comfortable in the current stretched position.

Once this occurs, you should then attempt to increase the stretch a little further so that the muscles are feeling a little uncomfortable again and then PATIENTLY wait while your body RELAXES into the new position. Deep slow rhythmic breathing helps greatly in this type of stretching. Try to breathe in the same rhythm as if you were trying to sleep. This tricks your nervous system into relaxation mode and helps the opposing muscles in a stretched position let go and relax.

Again, this type of stretching is best performed after training, when the body has heated up. Relaxed stretching can also be utilized while watching TV or listening to the radio, but you must be able to complete your routine several hours before you go to sleep. In other words, you do not want to go to bed immediately after a relaxed stretching workout.

Isometric Contraction Stretching (ICS)

This type of stretching should be done on days that you are not going to train. If you are going to train, it should be several hours later in the day. The objective of Isometric Contraction is to make the opposing muscle groups fatigued and/or much too tired to prevent a further progress in the stretch.

The procedure is to go into a stretched position that is still comfortable. In other words, it is easy. Then gradually flex and squeeze the muscles into a contraction. A good approach is to increase the muscle tension one breath at a time so that by the 4th or 5th breath, you are flexing at approximately 70% of a maximum effort. Now, take in a full maximum inhale and hold it in, while contracting your entire body.

Squeeze your fists, your toes, legs, torso, arms, everything. Hold this complete tension for a second or two and then breathe out “like a sigh of relief” and let your body go limp. Imagine you are like a wet noodle. Your stretch should automatically increase as the involved body parts relaxed when the tension was removed. Don’t let yourself go too far too fast! An inch at a time is more than enough.

Keep repeating this procedure until you can no longer increase the range of motion in the stretch. Never breathe heavily or hyperventilate. Take deep full breaths and hold them in your lungs to compensate for the needed oxygen.

Never contract the muscles instantly. You should gradually increase the tension with each breath until you reach full contraction. This type of stretching also helps to strengthen the muscles due to isometric exercise. Make sure you really give your muscles a good workout by applying true effort to your flexing and muscular contractions. After a short while, you will be able to make your body feel “Rock Hard” whenever you want. This is really great stuff, if you like to spar or kickbox.

Acupressure Points

By applying pressure with the tips of your fingers or thumb to the specific muscle area that is feeling pain during a stretch, you can significantly reduce the pain allowing you to stretch further on the next effort. This technique is best utilized in your relaxed stretching routines.

For example, if you are trying to achieve the splits, then you should acupressure your groin area and the muscle areas that “feel the pain of the stretch” on a regular basis, at least 3 to 4 times per week.

Again, do not forget to stretch your NECK and Calf muscles! Apply the acupressure in the shape of a plus sign “+” to the areas that are uncomfortable. Breathe deeply and fully as if you were trying to fall asleep. Imagine that warm towels or heating pads are being applied to the painful areas of your body. This will also help the muscles to relax.

Training Schedule

You should try to stretch at least 3 to 4 times per week. However, try not to do more than two days in a row if possible. Two days on and one day off is a good schedule if you are really going to stretch frequently.

Do Not FORCE your progress! Your stretching routine should be designed so that most of your stretching workouts are comfortable and just a little more difficult than a flexibility maintenance session.

Twice per week, you should have a real go at it and try to reach new levels in your stretching. This allows your mind and body time to adjust to the increasing levels of flexibility. Always give yourself a day off after a really hard stretching workout.

If you organize your flexibility program around these scientifically proven and well-researched methods, your flexibility is certain to improve. Make sure that you take time to strengthen the muscles used in your specific activity to prevent unwanted injuries. Flexibility without proper muscular strength almost always leads to an injury.

Please review some of our other training articles in this regard. If you have an injury that you are trying to recover from, always consult your doctor prior to beginning any stretching or physical exercise program.

“BONUS” Stretching Tips

The secret of getting stretched out is in using your body's pressure points. The main reason people don't like to stretch is due to the pain involved. They try stretching out to their maximum and by the next day they are in so much pain that they give up. However, if you use the pressure points (also called acupressure) while you stretch and then again after, this will usually be enough so that you won't have the pain the next day. The pain is due to lack of blood- flow. Without good blood circulation, the area screams out to your brain that it is in pain.

When you use pressure points in the area of the pain, it causes the blood to start circulating again and takes the pain away. For example, if you ever push down on the middle of a water balloon you will see that the water is pushed in both directions. When you push on a pressure point, your blood is pushed in both directions. Pushing down on the pressure point causes the blood to flow through painful areas which are constricted. Be sure you read pages 3 and 4 of the Pressure Points booklet to learn how to use the pressure points.

Using pressure points is more effective than using a stretching machine. A stretching machine stretches your muscles unevenly, the maximum pull being in the middle of areas being stretched. For example, if you loop a rubber band over your index fingers and start pulling it apart) you'll find the area in the middle of the rubber band will really be stretched. If you told someone to try stretching only the middle part of the rubber band further, it probably wouldn't stretch much

more. However, if you told them to stretch the area of the rubber band next to your index fingers they would be able to stretch it a lot more than the middle part of the band. A machine stretches the middle of the muscle, but not the part of the tendon where it attaches to your bone. If you want to get more flexible, you have to stretch all the tendon areas (tendons are the end parts of your muscles that attach your muscles to your bones). This is why pressing down all along your tendon areas will help you get more flexible.

If you hit a person on a pressure point which is located on the chart we provided, it will certainly hurt them. Try locating a pressure point on yourself and push down hard and you will see what we say is true. As with anything, it takes practice to become good at it. When most people get into a fight, they're just trying to make contact and are not specifically trying to hit someone in a pressure point area. Through practice you can learn to target those pressure point areas and it will make a difference. The lines on the chart indicate the upper layer of muscle structure. The larger dots on the chart mean the pressure point is closer to the skin and easier to reach. The smaller dots are located deeper and you usually have to go through a muscle or tendon group in order to reach it. You will find it is easier to reach some pressure points by pushing on them at an angle, which will allow you deeper penetration.

Before you start doing a maximum stretch workout, be sure you warm up your body. This helps you avoid injuries to your muscles and tendons and allows you greater flexibility. Start out with stretches which will loosen you up only, but not pushing it hard. Next, run in place, use an exercise bike, or take a hot shower, in order to get your body warm enough where you can start stretching to your maximum.

- To get into a splits position, you must train your body to do what your mind tells it. This is done by stretching regularly. It is also accomplished by teaching your body to stretch in the right way. You should try to relax as much as possible, taking long slow relaxing breaths, as you stretch. As you reach your maximum stretch position for a particular stretch, you need to hold the stretch for at least thirty seconds. This will allow your body to adjust to the new stretch level making it easier to reach the same level the next time you stretch. After holding the stretch for a minimum of thirty seconds (up to a maximum of 10 minutes) while being as relaxed as possible, you should tighten up and hold for 5-7 seconds, relax, then tighten again for 5-7 seconds.

Stretch every day, but stretch to your maximum no more than every other day. After stretching to your maximum, make sure you again work on all the sore areas of your body. Pushing on the sore area itself, and then to the areas around the sore area will help take the pain away. If you find that the pain is not going away, you will need to take a hot bath in Epsom Salt for at least 30 mins. For best results, make the water as hot as you can stand it.

If you have any problems, please write or call us when you can talk to an instructor.