

# stretching: the truth

Follow our **new rules** of stretching and your ready-for-anything body will be just around the bend

BY LISA ANN SMITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY BETH BISCHOFF

## Stretching is like backing up your PC:

You know you should do it, but it's easy to blow off. Besides, you never really learned how. Stretch before you sweat? After? Are a couple of toe touches enough? If you're anything like us, you're so confused you may not bother stretching at all.

But that kind of play-and-pray strategy is risky. Unlike your computer, your body doesn't auto-save. You risk losing your range of motion and stability if you skip out on stretching. So we asked experts to analyze the research and give us the real deal.

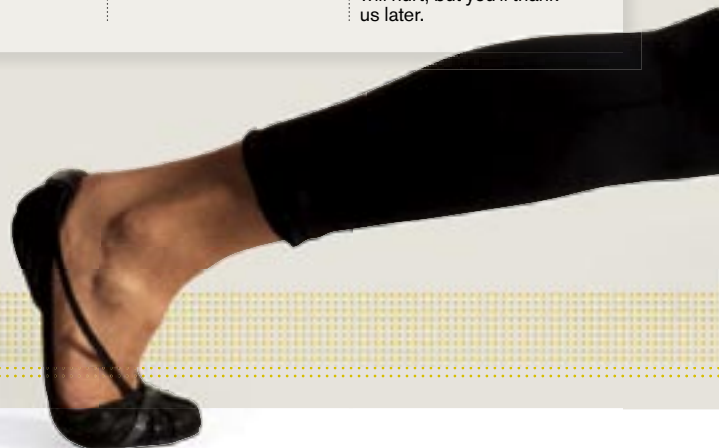
What we learned: There are three key kinds of stretching. Combine them strategically (yet simply) and you'll prepare your muscles to expand and contract quickly so you can finesse your way around the field, up your flexibility, and promote healing between workouts.

Check out our chart, then use our customizable moves to get the perfect flexibility triple play.

## go long!

a cheat sheet to the three MUST-DO stretching styles

	dynamic	static	myofascial
WHAT IS IT?	➔ Moving your arms and legs through a range of motion without stopping to hold any single position.	➔ Stretching a muscle as far as you can without pain and then holding it there.	➔ Applying pressure to different muscles by sliding parts of your body over a foam roller.
DO IT WHEN?	➤ Before you work out and right after a light cardio warmup.	➤ After your workout.	➤ Anytime
WHY BOTHER?	➔ So you won't drag through the first few minutes of your workout. "You're prepping your body for what's required next," says New York City trainer Joe Dowdell. Essentially, you're training your muscles—which have memory—to stretch and contract through a specific type of motion.	➔ To increase flexibility. When you stretch a muscle, sensory receptors pick up the info and send it to the central nervous system, which signals the muscles to contract. If you hold steady, the muscle relaxes to protect itself, says William E. Prentice, Ph.D., coordinator of the sports medicine program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.	➔ Less overall tension. You're actually hitting the fascia, the membranes that surround muscles. Translation: You're bulldozing knots so the muscles can contract without grinding against each other.
EXTRA INTEL	➕ Keep the motion smooth and controlled.	➕ Hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.	➕ Press as much of your body weight as possible into the foam roller. It will hurt, but you'll thank us later.



# dynamic must-dos



## hand walks > Targets calves and hamstrings

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and your arms at your sides. Bend forward and place your hands on the floor about shoulder-width apart; get them as close to your feet as you can without bending your knees (A). Step one hand forward a few inches, then the other, moving into plank position (B). Walk your feet back toward your hands, keeping legs straight. That's one rep. Do four to five.



## 90-90 > Targets chest, obliques, and back

Lie on your left side with your shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles aligned. Extend both arms in front of you at shoulder height, palms pressed together. At the same time, bring your knees up so they're in line with your hips (A). Keeping your left arm and both legs in position, bring your right arm up and over your body and twist to the right, until your right hand and upper back are flat on the floor (B). Bring your right arm back to the starting position. That's one rep. Do five to six and then repeat on the other side.

» After a three- to five-minute walk or light jog, do these dynamic stretches to get ready to rock when you hit the gym, field, trail, pool, or court. "Dynamic stretching increases body and muscle temperature, enhances joint flexibility, and increases muscle elasticity through a range of motion," says Cedric Bryant, Ph.D., chief science officer for the American Council on Exercise. Do the first three moves, from

Joe Dowdell, founder and co-owner of Peak Performance Strength & Conditioning Center in New York City, before every workout, then customize the rest of your warmup by adding the sport-specific moves for your chosen exercise.



## walking spiderman > Targets hips and quads

Lunge forward with your left leg until your left thigh is parallel to the floor. For stability, lean forward and place your right hand on the floor in line with your left foot. With your left hand, grab your right arm just above the elbow; place your left elbow just below your left knee. Squeeze your glutes, step your right leg forward, and return to standing. Repeat on the other side. That's one rep. Do four to five reps without pausing.



**IF YOU  
run or ride  
a bike**

**YOU REALLY NEED  
TO STRETCH  
your quads**

**SO ADD THIS...  
walking stretch**

Stand with your feet together and your arms at your sides. Step forward with your left foot and grab your right foot or ankle with your right hand. Keep your torso upright and your right knee pointing straight down as you pull your calf toward your hamstring. Hold for one second, then release the right leg and step forward. Repeat the sequence on the other side. That's one rep. Do 8 to 10.

**IF YOU  
swim**

**YOU REALLY NEED  
TO STRETCH  
your chest  
and back**

**SO ADD THIS...  
standing scapular  
wall slide**

Stand with your back to a wall a few inches away from you and lean your head, back, and butt against the wall. Bend your elbows 90 degrees and raise them out to the sides so your hands (palms facing out) are at shoulder height. Keeping your arms pressed into the wall, lower your elbows as far as possible (A). Hold for a second, squeezing your shoulder blades together, then slide your arms up the wall as high as they will go without losing contact with the wall (B). When you start to lose contact, bring your arms back to the starting position. That's one rep. Do 8 to 10.



**IF YOU  
weight train**

**YOU REALLY NEED  
TO STRETCH  
your shoulders**

**SO ADD THESE...  
swiss ball wall roll**

Grab a stability ball and stand, feet hip-width apart, about two feet away from a wall. Rest the ball on the wall and position it so the top is at eye level. With your elbows bent and your palms facing each other, press the ball into the wall, leaning into it with your forearms (A). Extend your arms and roll the ball up the wall. As you reach the top of the stretch, try to bring your torso toward the wall—without arching your lower back (B). Roll the ball back to the starting position. That's one rep. Do six to eight.



**swiss ball shoulder rotation**

Lie facedown on a stability ball with your legs straight and your toes set wider than shoulder-width apart on the floor. Bend your elbows 90 degrees—you'll keep them bent throughout the move. Raise your arms out to the sides to shoulder height, hands in fists and thumbs facing the floor (A). Keeping your upper arms in place, rotate your forearms down until your thumbs are facing your toes (B). Rotate your forearms back to the starting position. That's one rep. Do 8 to 10.



**IF YOU play softball, basketball, or tennis**

**YOU REALLY NEED TO STRETCH your torso, hips, and obliques**

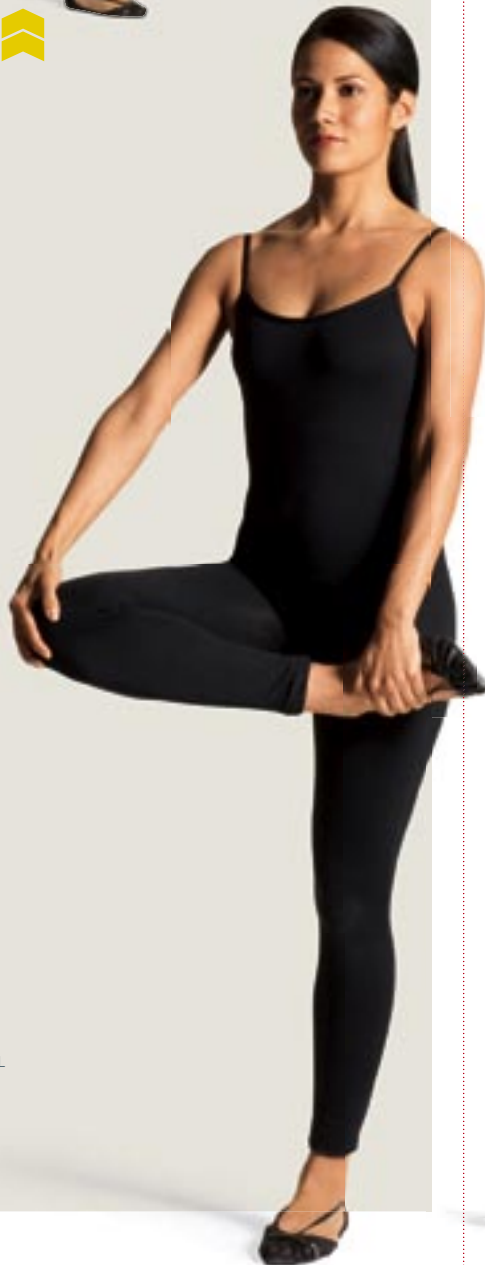
**SO ADD THESE...**

**reverse lunge with lateral trunk flexion**

Stand with your feet hip-width apart, arms at your sides. Take a giant step back with your left foot and sink into a lunge until your right thigh is parallel to the floor (A). Lift your left arm straight up, then lean your torso to the right (B). Lower your left arm back down to your side as you step forward with your left foot. Repeat on the other side. That's one rep. Do four to five.

**walking alternating leg cradle**

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and your arms at your sides. Step forward with your left leg and lift your right leg, bending your knee and raising your right foot toward your left hip with your inner ankle turned toward the ceiling. Holding the top of your right foot with your left hand and your right knee with your right hand, gently pull your entire right leg up toward your chest. Release the right leg and step it forward. Repeat with the other leg. That's one rep. Do five.



**roll with it**

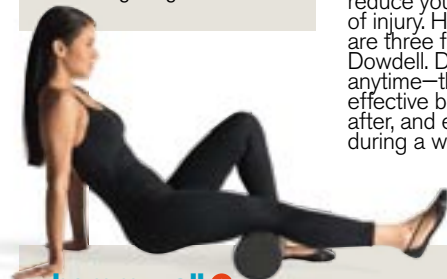
**> release tension in a matter of minutes**



**IT band roll**

Lie on your left side with your legs straight and your left hip on a foam roller. Place your palms on the floor in front of you and place your right foot flat on the floor in front of your left knee. Straighten your arms and lift your torso off the floor. Press your body weight on the roller. Slowly roll from the hip down to the knee and back up to the hip. For a deeper stretch, rest your right leg on top of your left as you roll. Repeat on the right leg.

**Foam rolling**—or “self myofascial release”—eases muscle tension as you roll muscles over a foam cylinder (\$7, power-systems.com). How it works: The pressure softens, lengthens, and realigns the fascia so the muscles can relax. This not only feels great but also breaks up knots and can reduce your risk of injury. Here are three from Dowdell. Do them anytime—they're effective before, after, and even during a workout.



**hammy roll**

Sit on the floor with your legs extended. Place your left foot flat on the floor next to your right calf and place the foam roller under your right knee. With your palms on the floor behind you, lift your butt and right foot, keeping your hands still, and slowly roll from the back of the knee joint up to your hip and back. Do another rep with your leg turned in slightly, then one with your leg turned out; repeat on the other side.

**trainer tip**

**Each complete roll (down and back) should take at least five seconds. If any spot feels especially tight—you'll know by the way it hurts like crazy as you pass over it—pause at that spot for an extra two seconds before continuing.**

**back-it-up roll**

Lie with a foam roller under your upper back and your feet a foot from your butt. Raise your hips and torso so that most of your body weight rests on the roller. Cross your arms, then lift your elbows toward the ceiling so the roller is in contact with your back muscles, not your shoulder blades. Keeping your feet planted, slowly roll down until the roller hits the small of your back, then return to the starting position.



STYLING: MARIA BEDIWA; HAIR AND MAKEUP: CHUCK JENSEN/MARK EDWARD INC. CAPEZIO BODYSUIT, MODEL'S OWN SHOES.

**WANT MORE?** SEE THE ESSENTIAL STRETCHES FOR YOUR SPORT AT WOMEN'S HEALTHMAG.COM/STRETCH.