Flexibility and Stretching

Flexibility training has been shown to help decrease athletic injuries, increase performance and serve as warm-up exercise.
It is useful to distinguish between flexibility and stretching.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is the ability to move a body part through a full range of motion without being restricted by tightness. Maintaining an adequate degree of flexibility is important to general health and total well being.

Successful performance of any activity depends on flexibility to reduce the likelihood of possible injury to ligaments, muscles and tendons. Tight soft tissue can restrict the range of motion of a joint, thus limiting performance. Lack of flexibility can also create functional problems. For example, a large percentage of low back pain is due to inadequate flexibility of the lumbar spine.

General Flexibility Guidelines

- Try to relax
- Stretching is not competitive (stretch at your own level)
- Do not bounce (fast, jerky movements cause contraction within the muscle)
- Slow static stretching is the most ideal way to stretch
- Hold each stretch for 15-30 seconds
- Do not stretch too far (stretch the muscle to the point where you feel a mild pulling sensation, not a pain)
- Do not hold your breath

REMEMBER: Stretching before you exercise prepares your body for exercise and helps prevent injuries. Stretching After exercise helps your body cool down, helps prevent muscle soreness and develops flexibility.

STRETCHING

Stretching is an essential part of every exercise program or sporting activity regardless of what activity you choose. In order to increase and maintain flexibility, it is necessary to perform appropriate (often basic) stretching exercises before and after each exercise session.
Stretching performed prior to an exercise session may not improve flexibility but does serve to temporarily improve range of motion and assists in the warm up process. Stretching post exercise (when muscles are warm and more receptive to stretching) will help to improve long term flexibility.

Stretching – Summary of Benefits

- Reduces muscle tension.
- Promotes freer and easier movement.
- Increases the range of motion for the joints and muscles.
- Helps prevent injuries such as muscle strains and ligament sprains.
- Develops an awareness of individual muscles and muscle groups.
- Relaxes the body.