



## Improving Flexibility

Most people are very interested in living healthy and fit lives. Two parts of living a healthy life are improving cardiovascular fitness to burn fat and enhancing muscle mass to build strong bones and have an appealing physical physique. However, there is a component missing – flexibility. The benefits of flexibility include freedom of movement, improved posture, increased likeliness of physical and mental relaxation, reduced muscle tension and soreness and reduced risk of injury.

Some individuals are more flexible naturally. The amount of flexibility tends to come from a mix of genetics, age, level of physical activity and gender. As people age, flexibility diminishes which is likely the result of inactivity, not aging itself.

Before performing and stretching exercises, warm-up the muscles a little bit. A quick walk around the block or some jumping jacks may be enough to get the muscles ready for stretching. (Stretching cold muscles is not recommended and can cause injury.) When performing any type of stretch, be sure to start slowly. The breathing method that is appropriate is to exhale as the muscle is being gently stretched. Hold each stretch for at least 10-30 seconds.

Holding the stretch, versus bouncing, provides a better stretch with a lesser chance of injury. Do not stretch a muscle that is not warmed-up. Another mistake is straining or pushing the muscle too far, if it hurts, release the stretch a little bit. Finally,, do not hold your breath.

Many people do not take the time to stretch, but it is suggested to spend at least 30 minutes, three times per week, on flexibility training. To find time to squeeze in stretching, consider taking a few minutes at the end of a workout, after you get out of a warm shower, when you get out of bed in the morning or during a regularly schedule class – like yoga.

**For assistance in developing a stretching program for your employees, contact Sharon Rateike, corporate wellness program coordinator at (920) 568-5475 or [Sharon.Rateike@forthc.com](mailto:Sharon.Rateike@forthc.com).**

