



Stretching shouldn't be all about touching your toes or trying to reach farther.

Do you pull until it hurts, endure the pain for a few moments and then gratefully breathe a sigh of relief as you release a stretch? If you associate stretching with discomfort and frustration, consider rethinking your approach. Stretching doesn't have to be painful to be effective. It could actually be an enjoyable and relaxing experience.

Instead of worrying about how far to reach as you stretch, instead focus on how the muscles feel while they are being stretched. Create a stretch through which the muscles can relax. If the muscles contract against the stretch, then back off on the stretch position. Focus on relaxing the muscles while maintaining the stretch at the point just before the muscles contract. By creating and sustaining a stretch that the muscles can relax through for just 15 or more seconds, you will immediately decrease the tension in the muscle fibers being stretched. If you repeat the stretch, it will feel easier and more comfortable the second time, providing instantaneous feedback that what you are doing is making a positive difference. Over time, with regular stretching, you will ultimately be able to move through a greater range of motion. However, while stretching, concentrate more on relaxing the muscles and on how the muscles feel than on how far you are reaching.

Slow static stretching could be done as a recovery from other exercise. This type of stretching could also be done independently of any other physical activity. It could be performed as a mind-body exercise or a type of relaxation technique. When you are concentrating on relaxing the muscles being stretched you are focused in the moment. You are not thinking about the bad things that occurred today or worrying about the worse stuff that might happen tomorrow. When unrelated thoughts enter your mind, just let them go and return your focus to your muscles in the present moment. To maximize the relaxation potential, slow your breathing by exhaling longer. Breath is directly tied to the autonomic nervous system. Slowing breathing deepens the focus in the moment and increases parasympathetic nervous tone which helps to further relax the muscles and the person.

Another way to include stretching into your day is to pair stretches with your usual activities of daily living. In the morning, when I shave, I alternate putting one foot and then the other on the bathroom sink counter. To clarify, I am shaving my face, not my legs! While putting my foot up on the cabinet I'm creating a stretch in my legs. What stretches could you do while showering, putting on your shoes or any of the other routine things that you do every day?

Stretching is also a great way to communicate with your body. Become familiar with your musculoskeletal system, you rely on it for every move you make and breath you take.

Here are a few links to give you some ideas for other stretches to try - [Mayo Clinic Desk Stretches: Video Collection](#) , [Mayo Clinic slide show: A Guide to Basic Stretches](#) & [RealSimple Stretches at Work](#).