**One Step at a Time Challenge**

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Stretching and Relaxing

Are you skipping one of the 5 fitness components? Stretching exercises should be incorporated in your workouts. All too often I observe people in the weight room that do not spend the time stretching after their workouts. Why is this component important to do? Here are some reasons why you should stretch:

1. It helps to increase range of motion and decrease muscle soreness. It will decrease joint deterioration.
2. Promotes blood circulation which helps with nutrient transportation.
3. Helps to reduce muscle tension and increase muscle relaxation.
4. Improves posture, especially when the back, shoulders, and chest are stretched, which allows for better body alignment.
5. Helps with post workout aches and pains. Keeps the muscles loose and not tight.
6. Improves overall efficiency in the body’s movements for everyday life activities with less energy.
7. Prepares the body for stress of an exercise. Warm up with large muscle movements the ones you will use in the exercise.
8. Reduce low back pain if you stretch hip flexors, hamstrings and muscles attached to the pelvis.
9. Reduces your chance of increase in injury if you over extend a muscle through other activities.
10. Lastly, if you want to feel less stress in your life stretching can help.

Stretching should at least be done after a strenuous workout and a minimum of at least 3 times per week. Stretching can be done anywhere. Next time you workout do not forget to stretch when you are done. It only takes 5-6 minutes to do some stretches.

Here are some other tips to think about while stretching:

* Stretch each major muscle groups by holding your stretch 15-30 seconds and repeating the stretch 2-4 times each.
* Do not hold your breath – normal breathing is recommended.
* A warm muscle stretches easier than a cold muscle.
* Static stretching should be done not bouncing.
* Stretch to the point of slight discomfort. Ease up if it hurts.

Relaxation Tips:

1. Take a warm bath or shower. Helps to relax muscles good time to stretch after a bath.
2. Read a book helps to get your mind off what is stressing you.
3. Listen to some music. Your choice on music is entirely up to you. Examples might be new age, smooth jazz, modern ballads, or classics. Target has some great CD’s that I listen to that are great.
4. Deep breathing can help. Stretching and yawning are good.
5. Spending time outdoors. Just a short walk can help. We live in Minnesota so get out and enjoy!
6. Sometimes visualization can help. Especially if you are stressed about giving a presentation.
7. Take a class in Yoga or Tai Chi
8. How about a sauna or hot tub.
9. Call a friend that you have not talked to for a while.
10. Go and exercise! Novel idea!