How to stretch the right way

Be Fit

Do you skip stretching after your workout because you don't have time? This may be a mistake: stretching can have benefits for flexibility, range of motion, and blood flow to the muscles, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians. But to reap these rewards, stretching needs to be done correctly. Be sure you follow these tips:

- *Never stretch cold muscles.* If you haven't been moving, it's not a good time to stretch. The best time is right after your workout, or at least after a 5-10 minute warm-up.

- *Don't bounce.* Use smooth, slow, controlled movements. Bouncing can actually harm muscles.

- *Breathe.* Be sure you're breathing in and out, and not holding your breath.

- *Hold it.* A good stretch should last at least 30 seconds, and you may want to hold some for up to 60 seconds.

- *Stretch until you feel it, but don't go too far.* Stretching should feel good, not painful. If it hurts, back off the stretch until it's comfortable, then hold.

If you have a strained muscle, sprain, or other injury, talk with your doctor before stretching or starting any exercise. People with chronic conditions, such as diabetes, arthritis, and heart disease, should also seek their doctor's advice on the safest exercises for them.