

York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

You lift, you get stronger. You run, you get faster. You improve your diet, you get leaner. You stretch, you get what? Stretching is often overlooked because the results are not as visible as cardio or strength training, or so you thought. After all, stretching is for the yogi's and geriatrics, right? Then you wake up one day and you have a slight pain in your lower back. Nothing major so you roll out of bed and you instinctively try to stretch it out. Maybe you lean over and touch your toes, which, coincidentally are very far from the tips of your fingers. It helps a bit, so you forget about it and go on with your day. Then you start to notice that after sitting all day at work, your lower back pain is worsening. You try to stretch it out once again. Maybe you put your hands on your lower back and do the old man, hips forward stretch with a sigh, but the pain lingers. Even if you exercise daily, sitting at your desk for 8 hours at a time is taking a toll on your body. The good news is that you can fix this problem and avoid muscle degeneration with easy stretches. Imagine a rubber band that just sits on your desk unused. The minute you go to try and extend that band it almost always snaps in half. Our muscles are comparable to a rubber band, the more you use the rubber band the more flexible and stronger the band remains. Stretching allows the body to warm-up as it encourages the flow of blood to all the right places, being the muscles. The muscles then enjoy an oxygen supply and the nutrients needed to keep them going throughout the day.

Whether you're a marathon runner, a gym rat, or a couch potato, there are many benefits to adding stretching to your daily routine. Stretching re-energises and relaxes. Stretching also releases stress, assists with posture, improves balance, flexibility and the performance of everyday activities. There should be nothing hard about stretching. This is the time to relax and enjoy. Each stretch should cause your muscles to feel comfortably stretched but not distressed. Never force a stretch, and never stretch so far that you feel pain, allow muscles to feel slightly uncomfortable.

With practice and patience, flexibility will increase. Gaining flexibility is primarily about discipline. Stretching once today won't magically give you perfect flexibility. You'll need to do it over time and remain committed to the process. If you do not stretch, or do so only sporadically, your gains in flexibility will be limited. To improve your flexibility, you should stretch once a day, short, repeated

exposure to stretching is more productive than a single intense or long bout of stretching. For example, it is far better to stretch ten minutes per day, every day, then to stretch 70 minutes once a week. Again, stretching is a long-term commitment and must be continued indefinitely to maintain and/or increase flexibility. It may have taken you many months to get tight muscles, so you're not going to be perfectly flexible after one or two sessions.

Stretching provides your mind with a mental break. Sometimes you may have trouble staying awake during your long day. If you're feeling like your dragging your heels? Then it might help to get out of your seat and do a few quality stretches for a boost of energy, helping your mind and body be more alert. Muscles tighten when they are stagnant, they get tired and that makes us feel even more lethargic. So, stand up and do some stretches. It will help you to quickly, effectively and efficiently revitalize your energy levels.

Circulation is one of those things you probably never think about, even though it's essential for good health. When your circulatory system is working well, it delivers oxygen throughout the body and helps to eliminate waste. When circulation is poor, your blood doesn't flow as vigorously and symptoms can include numbness in your fingers and toes, bloating, fluid retention, and a lack of energy. If you're not performing dynamic stretches throughout your day, then your circulation may be suffering. Dynamic stretches that require you to move through the stretch without holding it for more than a few seconds at a time are great for increasing blood flow at a low intensity. Circulatory problems can also result in pain and muscle cramps that can negatively affect athletic performance, not to mention discomfort during your everyday activities.

Focus on your form when stretching, proper posture should be maintained, and joints need to be aligned, such as your knee and ankle. Modify, adapt, and adjust the stretch to suit your particular needs. Take your time and gently ease into each stretch. Try to hold the stretch for 30-40 seconds. Take a moment to rest between stretches. Be aware of your breathing. Never hold your breath. Breathe naturally throughout each stretch. Here are a few dynamic stretches to incorporate into your daily routine.

YOGA POSES

TO IMPROVE CIRCULATION



THE BENEFITS

Poor circulation can cause all sorts of problems in your body like fluid retention and swelling in the lower extremities. These yoga poses offer one way to help get your heart pumping and improve your body's circulation.

Stretching is a great way to relieve the strain from your busy day and recharge your body and mind. Incorporating stretching into your daily workouts is a given but including it in your day to day routine is just as important to health and body functioning as regular exercise. Everyone can learn to stretch, regardless of age or flexibility. Be sure to talk to a certified trainer to find a plan that best suits your fitness level and goals. Why not embraced the opportunity to improve your health and working lives and join a YUSA fitness class? Be kind to your muscles and they will be kind to you.

For more information about the YUSA Fitness Program please contact Kerriane Brown at fitnessandevents@yusapuy.ca

Happy Stretching!

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