

# STRETCHING/EXERCISE CONSIDERATIONS

While there are many great benefits of stretching/exercising, there are a few general considerations to take into account.

## USE PROPER FORM

Whether you are standing, sitting, or lying during physical activity, proper form is important in order to gain the best results and decrease the risk of injury or strain. If a stretch/exercise feels uncomfortable or painful, make sure you are using proper form and posture. **If it still hurts, discontinue the stretch/exercise.**

## KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Everyone's body is different and your own range of motion/tightness can vary. Perform stretches/exercises within a pain-free range; you should feel a slight pull in your muscle but no pain. Listen to your own body and do what works for you. If you notice pain or catch yourself holding your breath, lessen the stretch or do a different stretch altogether.

## BREATHING

Many people unconsciously hold their breath during physical activity or breathe too hard; both of which can create more tension in the muscles. Your breathing should be slow and controlled while also taking deep breaths; breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Proper breathing helps relax muscles, increase blood flow, and increase oxygen to the muscles.

## PROGRESS GRADUALLY

If you are starting a new routine, do not try to do every single stretch for the full amount of time. Start with a few stretches and see what feels good for your body. In addition, hold the position for a shorter amount of time (5-15 sec) and work your way up (20-30 sec). As the muscle loosens and lengthens, the stretches can be deepened and performed longer.

## BE GENTLE AND SLOW

Stretching should be relaxing and peaceful; therefore, take your time performing your stretches. Set aside time each day (even just 5-10 min) and do not rush through it. In addition, slow and gentle stretches help relax the muscles and mind more. Performing movements slowly will also decrease risk of injury or muscle strain.

## BE PATIENT

Depending on how tight your muscles are, it could take longer to fully relax and lengthen the muscles and to feel the full benefits of stretching; the same is true for exercising. You will notice better and faster results if you create a routine for yourself and stay consistent.

## UNBALANCED MUSCLES

When stretching, you may notice that one side of your body is tighter than the other (it's okay this is normal). Instead of focusing on being as flexible as a gymnast, focus on balancing your flexibility. You can perform more reps of a stretch or hold it for a longer period on the tighter side to even out the muscles.

## DON'T COMPARE

Once again, everyone is different and this includes levels of muscle tightness and flexibility. You may not be able to perform a stretch like a gymnast but that is okay! Focus on improving your overall health and wellness and making your body feel better. If you have scoliosis, especially after surgery, your body may not move the same way as others and that is normal!