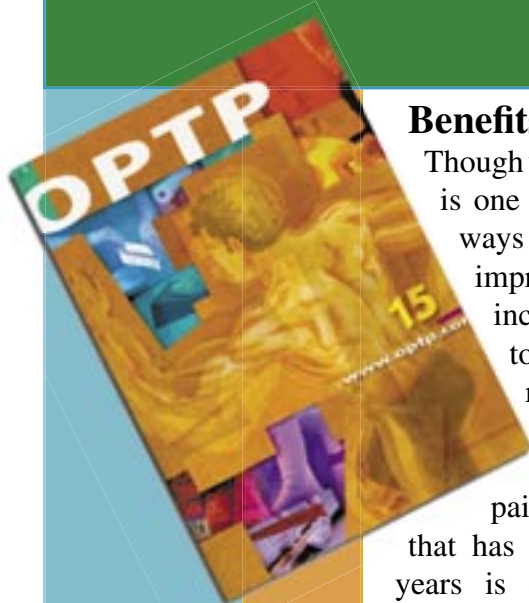


Flexibility with PNF Stretching

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Benefits of Stretching

Though usually overlooked, stretching is one of the easiest and rewarding ways to improve one's health. It improves athletic performance, increases circulation, contributes to maintaining correct posture, relieves stress, improves coordination and balance, and reduces low back pain. One form of stretching that has proven its benefits over the years is called PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation) stretching.

What is PNF Stretching?

PNF stretching is a flexibility protocol that "uses a partner or product as resistance for manually applying various patterns of movement for the purpose of strengthening and restraining muscles" (Bottomley, 131). There are a few different forms of PNF stretching. The two most common are Contract-Relax and Contract-Relax-Antagonist-Contract (CRAC).

Contract-Relax

1. Hook the Stretch Out® Strap (SOS)* end loop around the middle of the left foot. Lie back, holding the leg straight (knee slightly bent).
2. With both hands holding the SOS, pull the leg up. Once you feel you have stretched your leg as far as you can comfortably, hold for ten seconds. Then try to push the leg down while resisting with the SOS.
3. Relax for a second and pull the leg back up higher, hold. Push the leg down and relax. Repeat with other leg. Refer to figure 1.

*SOS, available from OPTP, delivers the benefits of PNF stretching without a partner.

Remember to keep the buttock flat on the floor and the knees slightly bent. Hold the stretch for a minimum of ten seconds.



Figure 1

Contract-Relax-Antagonist-Contract (CRAC)

Another form of PNF stretching is called CRAC. This form is similar to Contract-Relax.

1. Follow steps 1 and 2 in the Contract-Relax instructions.
2. Isometrically contract the quadricep, while increasing tension to the hamstring without moving the leg.
3. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat with other leg.

With the CRAC method you do not need to repeat the stretch as you do with the Contract-Relax method because by contracting the quadricep you increase relaxation and flexibility in the hamstring. A further stretch can be added but the risk of injury is increased.

Caution:

Consult your family physician before starting any fitness program.

Always warm up your muscles before stretching.

There may be some discomfort from stretching. Stop if there is any pain!

PNF Stretches

Calves, Hamstrings, Lower Back
Sit on the floor with both legs straight. Put the middle of the SOS around the middle of the feet. Hold the third set of loops, one in each hand. Pull back on the SOS, relax for a second then move forward grasping the next set of loops. Remember to keep the head up and the back flat. Continue until you can hold onto your feet. Hold the stretch for a minimum of ten seconds. Refer to Figure 2.



Figure 2

With one leg crossed over the other, do the same stretch as above. You will not be able to reach as far because the leg is crossed over. Hold each stretch for a minimum of ten seconds. Repeat with other leg. Refer to Figure 3.



Figure 3

Tim LaVallee, past technical director of the U.S. Ski Team & Director of Skiing at Gould Academy states: *“Here at Gould, we feel PNF stretching is preferable to either ballistic or static stretching. The Stretch Out [Strap] allows each athlete to perform their resistance work in a timely fashion, facilitating minimal time lost in the warm-up period preceding training. Having personally used the Stretch Out [Strap], I find its simplicity and functional ability outstanding.*”

Triceps and Biceps

Hold the end loop in your right hand, bring the SOS over your left shoulder and grasp it from behind with your left hand. Refer to Figure 4.



Figure 4

Pull down with the right while resisting with the left, relax for a second and pull the right hand closer to your left shoulder (Refer to Figure 5). This is like drying your back with a towel. This is one stretch where you can stretch out both arms at the same time. Hold each stretch for a minimum of ten seconds. Repeat with other arm.



Figure 5

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