



# The Hidden Benefits of Stretching

## strength, length, and freedom from pain!

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### Hidden Benefits

Most of us who exercise on a regular or semi-regular basis know about the importance of stretching. We've been told since third grade gym class that we must stretch to avoid injury. While this is true, and very important, stretching also benefits us in many other ways that aren't necessarily sport specific. Many of the benefits of stretching can aid us in our daily lives, making them more enjoyable. For instance, stretching on a regular basis helps to significantly reduce stress. Requiring us to focus on muscle isolation and breathing, therefore releasing tension in the muscles, sends a signal to our brain that it's time to relax. Another traditionally overlooked benefit of stretching is posture improvement. Over the years our bodies tend to develop imbalances due to the tightening of certain muscles. As a muscle tightens, it also weakens and loses blood flow. Suzanne Martin, PT, DPT, describes this phenomenon in the following way:

"Stretching affects not only our muscle system, but also our neurological system, which includes the operation of the brain."

-Suzanne Martin, PT

"Stretching affects not only our muscle system, but also our neurological system, which includes the operation of the brain. When you stretch, you lengthen some areas while relaxing others. The brain in turn regulates automatic functions such as heart rate and blood pressure. It secretes hormones, which act as chemical messengers to help insulin control, metabolism, mood, and emotion."<sup>1</sup>

It's easy to see why stretching is of such benefit for everyday life- you needn't be a professional athlete or a 10 year old preparing for the rope climb. A consistent stretching routine can help all of us sitting at our desks to sit a little bit straighter and bend down with a little less resistance. A great tool for self-stretching is OPTP's **Stretch Out® Strap**. The patented Stretch Out Strap delivers all the benefits of assisted stretching without a partner. The multiple position grips allow deep, gradual stretching of major muscle groups. It comes with an instructional booklet that includes 30 exercises.

Stretching is also an important component in the fight against back pain.



"Focused and correct stretching helps align the spine and balance the muscle groups that would otherwise become shortened by gravity over time. As we age and our bodies slowly dehydrate, stretching is even more important. ... Not only do our muscles, tendons, and ligaments dry out and tighten, they become leathery. Over time this causes the body to stiffen, gradually giving a stooped appearance, but it also begins to block the healthy circulation of nutrients around the body."<sup>1</sup>

She goes on to mention:

### Stretching for Rehab and Back Pain

In his book, "Maintaining Body Balance, Flexibility, and Stability, Leon Chaitow, ND, DO, makes the following statement on the order of stretching vs. strengthening an injured or tight area:

"You might think that the first priority in postural correction, or the regaining of fitness, should be the strengthening and toning of weak muscles but this is not necessarily correct. The fact is that by freeing and loosening tight muscles, you will achieve increased strength in the weak muscles automatically. ... So the evidence is that to begin a program aimed at improving

function with the toning up of the weak muscles is a mistake. The correct sequence should be to loosen the tight muscles, which then allows a natural regeneration of tone and strength to take place in the weak muscles.”<sup>2</sup>

With an aging population and increase in sedentary living, back pain is rapidly becoming America’s number one medical nuisance. According to Spine-Health.com:

“Almost everyone can benefit from stretching the soft tissues- the muscles, ligaments and tendons- in the back and around the spine. The spinal column and its contiguous muscles, ligaments and tendons are all designed to move, and limitations in this motion can accentuate back pain. Patients with chronic back pain may find it takes weeks or months of stretching to mobilize the spine and soft tissues, but will find that meaningful and sustained relief of low back pain typically follows the increase in motion.”<sup>3</sup>

### Hamstrings also noted:

“The hamstring muscles seem to play a key role in low back pain, as patients who have low back pain tend to have tight hamstrings, and patients with tight hamstrings tend to have low back pain. It is not known which comes first, but it is clear that hamstring tightness limits motion in the pelvis and can place it in a position that increases stress across the low back. Therefore, it follows that stretching the hamstring muscles typically helps decrease the intensity of a patient’s back pain and the frequency of recurrences.”<sup>3</sup>

## Strength with Length

In her course, *Strength with Length*, Michelle Schwahn, PT, AFAA, looks closely at the benefits of active and dynamic flexibility. According to Michelle:

“In my years as a PT working with patients and clients with soft tissue and myofascial restrictions, I have seen immense improvements in ROM and flexibility with Active Stretching Programs on the ball and now with the new **Core Challenge Roller®**. Particularly with my mastectomy patients and their extensive thoracic and shoulder restrictions as a result of their surgical adhesions. Their recovery and full restoration of not only motion, but strength on the ball and Core Challenge Roller has been remarkable!”<sup>4</sup>



## Stretching Resources

### Stretch Out® Strap (#440)

OPTP is the exclusive distributor of the patented Stretch Out® Strap which delivers the benefits of PNF (proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation) stretching without a partner.

The Stretch Out® Strap has a double stitched series of loops for hands and feet that allow users to work progressively into a stretch. An instruction booklet with 30 exercises is included.



### Maintaining Body Balance, Flexibility and Stability (#8707)

Leon Chaitow, ND,DO, encourages a balanced partnership between individuals and trainers. The exercises in the text are explained by a combination of step-by-step instructions, illustrations and self-assessment tests to measure

progress. Topics discussed include: muscle energy techniques (METs), trigger points, self mobilization, strength, stability, balance, breathing and positional release techniques. Illustrated. Softcover, 197 pages.

### AUTOSTRETCHING (#8220)

by Olaf Evjenth and Jern Hamberg is an ideal self-stretching guide and reference. Exercises are described in detail for most muscle groups. Color photos and anatomical sketches accompany each stretch. Hardcover, 248 pages.



## Product Mentions

All products mentioned in this newsletter can be purchased from OPTP. Shop online at OPTP.com to see all of our stretching products & resources, or talk to one of our knowledgeable customer service representatives Monday-Friday from 8AM-5PM CST. Call us today at 1-800-367-7393, and we’ll be happy to assist you with all your health and fitness needs.

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### References:

- 1) Martin, Suzanne, PT. “Stretching.” DK Publishing, Inc., ©2005. P. 12.
- 2) Chaitow, Leon, ND, DO. “Maintaining Body Balance, Flexibility and Stability.” Churchill Livingstone, ©2004. Pp. 17-18.
- 3) Spine-Health.com. “Exercise for Back Pain.” [www.spine-health.com/print/topics/conserv/overview/exercise/ex001.html](http://www.spine-health.com/print/topics/conserv/overview/exercise/ex001.html)
- 4) Michelle Schwahn, PT, AFAA. *Strength with Length* course outline.