

The Importance of Flexibility

There are three main components of fitness – aerobic, strength, and flexibility. Oftentimes, flexibility is overlooked and undervalued, especially with men, to the same extent that strength training is often overlooked or avoided by woman. Achieving optimal flexibility allows an individual to turn, stretch, twist and bend without any stiffness, pain or joint damage. It also increases the blood supply and nutrients to joint structures, which then increases circulation, all of which leads to better elasticity of the tissues surrounding the joints.

Flexibility is defined as the absolute range of movement in a joint or series of joints and muscles that is attainable in a momentary effort. It is the measurement of the achievable distance between the flexed position and the extended position of a particular joint or muscle group. Flexibility of a joint depends on many factors, including length and looseness of the muscle and the shape of the bones and cartilage that support the muscle.

Many conditions can decrease flexibility, such as age, obesity, arthritis and/or a sedentary lifestyle. Usually these conditions go hand in hand and are reversed when practicing optimal health. Lack of flexibility can make simple, every day tasks seem like a struggle, such as getting in and out of a car or bending down to pick something up. Poor flexibility over a long period of time can lead to stiffness, poor posture, back problems, movement limitations and increased risk for injury.

Some sports require extreme flexibility, such as gymnastics. But as most adults are not gymnasts, extreme flexibility is not necessary for everyday life. A regular exercise regimen that includes aerobic, strength training and stretching is usually sufficient. Practicing yoga is a great way to increase flexibility, especially Bikram yoga, as the heat and humidity allow for a deeper stretch.

It is important to remember not to force flexibility, as it should be achieved over time. In the beginning, it is common to experience soreness the next day. But the best way to lessen the soreness is to keep stretching! If too much time elapses between stretching, it will be like starting over every time, which will always be followed by soreness. Eventually, the soreness will go away and not stretching will feel uncomfortable! It is perfectly safe and encouraged to make stretching a part of every day.