



Is stretching that important?

Everyone has heard it or experienced it in some fashion or another on how beneficial stretching can be. To keep it short and sweet, the purpose of stretching, despite popular belief, is to increase blood flow to the muscles, not increase its length. The increase in length is an arbitrary benefit that comes with the consistency of stretching.

When muscles are tight they squeeze and slow the blood flow through our vessels. This is detrimental because the muscles will then, in essence, starve. Blood brings oxygen and nutrients to the muscles for growth and more importantly, repair and recovery. If a muscle goes without, it would be like starving yourself - it gets weak, breaks down and ultimately stops functioning properly.

The importance of stretching cannot be overstated. Stretching should be done between 3-6 times a day. Yes, I said it, 3-6 times daily. The purpose of this, like eating, is to allow blood to flow consistently throughout the day and help relax and repair the muscles from a long day of activity or worse yet, inactivity like driving, sitting at a desk or the sofa. The reason we get "tight" or feel inflexible after we sit for hours is due to the basic idea that the muscle is not allowed its nutrients via blood. The less blood the less healing, repair and recovery a muscle receives.

Now, add this up over years and years of sitting or living a sedentary lifestyle and you find yourself becoming very tight and opening yourself to injury. Stretching should be done 3-6 times daily, holding each stretch for 30 seconds. If you feel the need to stretch prior to activity, never stretch any one muscle for more than 4-6 seconds and it is preferable to do an active warm up over static stretching.



Don't overlook the benefits of stretching. Make sure it is a regular part of your fitness program.