



EXERCISES TO IMPROVE FLEXIBILITY

Raise your hand if you know what the most neglected component of fitness is?

IT'S FLEXIBILITY!

That's right! Among people who regularly exercise, most admit to getting in their cardio allotment, lifting some weights, and then bolting for the door!

I'm not going to pretend to understand why this is, but I do want to persuade you to include flexibility training as part of your regular workout routine if you have been neglecting it in the past!

WHAT IS FLEXIBILITY?

Flexibility is the ability to move your joints through a full range of motion. It is specific to each joint – so you can be flexible in your hips, but not have the ability to raise your arms up overhead to wash your hair (or vice versa). Recent cancer surgery, treatment, or past training can impact all of this.

WHY DOES FLEXIBILITY MATTER?

Lacking flexibility actually matters a lot! Not only can it interfere with your activities of daily living – like washing your hair or tying your shoes, it can also increase your risk of injury by restricting your movements and throwing your balance and agility off!



If you are experiencing cancer-related fatigue, lack of flexibility can actually increase your feelings of fatigue! Muscles that are less flexible have to work harder, which places additional stress on the cartilage within a joint. These cause the muscle to fatigue faster, and can zap you of energy.

HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR FLEXIBILITY?

No matter what your current level of flexibility is, you can still improve it! It isn't too late and you aren't genetically cursed if you've never been flexible!

To improve flexibility, simply **begin with a dynamic warm-up**. Try walking for a few minutes, doing some jumping jacks, or body weight exercises to get your blood flowing. You NEVER want to stretch a muscle that hasn't had the chance to warm up first – it can cause injury!

After your warm up, perform static stretches on all the major muscle groups in your body.

- Slowly stretch to a point of mild discomfort and hold that position for about 15 seconds.
- Be sure to keep breathing throughout the stretch.
- Never bounce or use your body momentum to get a deeper stretch!

1. UPPER BACK STRETCH

Start in a kneeling position with your hips directly under your shoulders. Slowly sit back onto your heels and stretch your arms on the floor in front of you and hold this position.



2. LOWER BACK STRETCH

Lie on your stomach with your hands facing forward and flat on the floor, directly under your shoulders. With your legs out behind you, exhale and lift your chest off the floor, keeping your hands on the ground. Be sure to keep your hips in contact with the ground. Hold this position.





3. STANDING QUAD STRETCH

Stand upright and bend one leg behind you. Hold on to the top of the foot with your hand and hold this position, keeping the knees together. You may need to hold onto a chair or wall for balance.



4. STANDING CALF STRETCH

Standing facing a wall, put one foot in front of you with your knee bent. Keep the back leg straight. Point both of your feet directly forward. Lean your upper body against the wall until you feel the stretch in the calf muscle in your back leg. Hold this stretch.



5. BUTTERFLY STRETCH

Sit on the floor and bring your feet together so the soles of your feet are touching and your knees are bent to opposite sides. Hold on to your feet, and with a straight back, lean forward slowly until you feel the stretch in your inner thighs. If you want a deeper stretch, you can use your elbows to gently push your thighs down towards the ground.





6. NECK STRETCH

Keep your head slightly forward and slowly tilt your ear toward your shoulder until you feel a stretch in the opposite side of your neck. Hold about 10 seconds. Slowly bring your head to center, and then to the opposite side to repeat. For a deeper stretch, you can use your hand to gently pull your head down.



7. CHEST & SHOULDER STRETCH

Find a corner of a wall and stand facing the corner with your arms shoulder level, bent at a 90° angle on either side of the wall. Slowly lead your chest forward towards the corner until you feel a stretch across your chest and shoulders. Hold this position.

