

## Stretching Exercises: Recommendations for Home Care

*This protocol is intended for 1) rehabilitation of injured tissue, 2) increasing flexibility, and 3) helps reduce or prevent symptoms associated with postural syndromes and inefficient movement patterns.*

**Be sure patients know what to do.** It is important that they know the number of repetitions, the number of sets, when to do the exercises, and reasons for discontinuing (e.g., worsens symptoms). Providing pictures and/or written information is helpful.

**Have patients do up to 5 repetitions of the stretch in a single set once a day.** Some studies suggest that stretching a muscle once a day is as effective at increasing flexibility as stretching three times a day.

**Stretches should be held for about 30 seconds.** Longer stretches (e.g., 60 seconds) do not appear to be any more effective at increasing flexibility.

**When teaching stretching exercises, have patients perform them to verify that it is working the targeted area.**

**Instruct patients to relax and breathe slowly while holding a stretch and to avoid bouncing in the stretch.**

**Make sure patients maintain good posture and that their joints are not loaded.** For example, the patient should avoid hyper-extending while doing a psoas or quadriceps stretch.

**Instruct patients to warm up the area to be stretched.** This can be done by jogging in place or moving the upper extremities for at least five minutes before doing the stretches. Warm-up activity may be useful in preventing injuries during a stretching program. In the case of dorsiflexors, pre-heating may hasten improvement in flexibility.

**Patients may enhance the stretch with a form of self-administered post-isometric relaxation.** This can be done by isometrically contracting the target muscle for 5 seconds *before* each stretch

**Contracting the antagonist *during* the stretch also enhances the exercise.** For example, contract the gluteus maximus during a psoas stretch.

**Have patients demonstrate the exercises at the next visit.** Very often the patient is no longer do the stretch correctly and will need to be re-directed.

**Inform patients that stretching after activities is thought be more effective than before the activity.** Brief, gentle stretching can be done before participating in a sport. But a longer stretching program should be reserved until after the patient has finished the activity.

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**References**

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