

THE LOW DOWN ON STRETCHING



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Static stretching

Static stretching involves taking a muscle to its end range of motion and then holding that position. It is often, although not always, passive. This type of stretching works well with warm muscles and can help aid relaxation and enhance flexibility, so is ideal as part of a cooldown routine. Another reason it's best saved for after training (or as part of a dedicated mobility session) is that long-hold static stretching immediately before high-intensity activity has been shown to temporarily reduce power output.

Optimal hold lengths vary depending on individual goals or concerns, so it's best to take personalised advice. For general flexibility training, ACSM (American College of Sports Medicine) recommends 10-30 seconds, repeated 2-4 times.

** When beginning a new exercise programme, it is always advisable to seek professional advice beforehand. With any exercise, avoid anything that causes pain and seek personalised advice if working with current/previous injuries.*



Stretching can be confusing – how much, how long, what type? Here's a quick breakdown, with suggestions for how and when to incorporate stretching into your routine.*

Active vs passive stretching

First, we need to understand the difference between active and passive stretching. Our active range of motion refers to the range we can access using our muscular strength and control. With passive stretching we tend to use an external force – such as a hand or a resistance band – to help us into the stretch.

If there's a big gap between active and passive ranges of motion, this could be an area to work on. For example, we might have the mobility to be taken into a position but lack the stability and control to hold ourselves there while maintaining good joint alignment. To improve both active and passive ranges of

motion, as well as reducing injury risk, we can work on joint mobility as well as building strength in the surrounding muscles.

Dynamic stretching

Dynamic stretching is a type of active stretching that uses controlled, repetitive motions – like arm or leg swings – to take joints through their full range of motion. It's an effective warm-up component as it increases blood flow, raises body temperature, and mobilises the joints.

Including 'rehearsal' movements that mimic the planned activity helps further prepare the body for exercise, but maintaining good joint position and alignment is key. Mobility coach Tom Morrison says: "The stretches you use need to compliment how your joints move. If you're overloading repetitive patterns, it's only a matter of time before something starts to hurt, so putting the work in to keep your joints happy keeps you able to do the things you enjoy."

RESOURCES

Tom Morrison is a great resource for mobility tips and sequences, as well as structured courses built around his Simplistic Mobility Method.

Visit tommorrison.uk, or find him on [instagram @tom.morrison.training](https://www.instagram.com/tom.morrison.training)