

# Sam's Good Health



## Flexibility

As winter slowly departs, many of us have our eyes set on the longer days, warmer weather, and the prospect of getting out from the confines of our living room into the fresh air. A great way to start the spring is by creating an exercise plan to help you become more flexible.

Flexibility has many health benefits. Being more flexible will help prevent injuries. From training, to running a 5K, to taking a hike in the woods, good flexibility will help reduce the risk of suffering a muscle strain or developing an overuse injury. Being flexible will help with posture, as oftentimes, poor posture is result of tight muscles. Having rounded shoulders and slouching while sitting can also lead to conditions that cause both shoulder and back pain. Being flexible will help with athletic performance; whether it is getting an edge your opponent in your tennis match, improving your golf swing, or going to show up the neighborhood kids in a basketball game, flexibility will help you move a little bit quicker, reach just a little bit farther, and give you that edge you need for some bragging rights. More importantly, being flexible will just make you feel better!

There are two types of stretching that can be done to improve your flexibility: dynamic stretching and static stretching. Dynamic stretching is an important part of a “dynamic warm-up” and has been shown to both reduce injury and increase athletic performance. This type of stretch takes the joint through its full active range of motion (*ROM*) by combining stretching with movement. Examples of dynamic stretching include forward walking lunges, side lunge walks, and high knee steps. This type of stretch, increasing muscle control and coordination, will also help with balance, and is best performed before beginning any activity.

Static stretching takes the joint to a *ROM* that is comfortable to you. This is the “sit and reach” type of stretching. Each stretch should be held for 10-30 seconds, and repeated 5-10 times. The butterfly stretch, cross arm stretch, and standing calf stretch are all examples of static stretches. When doing any static stretch, it is important not to bounce, as doing so could cause an injury. Static stretching is best done after activity as part of a “cool down” period. Research into the various types of stretching have shown that doing this type of stretch before athletic activity can actually decrease performance, not enhance it.

Being active is the best way to stay fit and feel healthy. Just adding in a few stretches to your everyday routine can do wonders to improve how you feel. It is important to know your limits and not overdo it. Stretch all your major muscle groups. While it just may be your hamstrings that feel tight, don't overlook your calves or your shoulders, because it's all connected! While you stretch, it is important to be relaxed and to breathe normally. If you need to hold your breath to stretch, you're pushing yourself too far.

For some ideas about both dynamic and static stretches, please visit the Vermont Orthopaedic Clinic's page at [www.dartfish.tv/isport](http://www.dartfish.tv/isport).



Matt Howland ATC is a certified athletic trainer that works at the Vermont Orthopaedic Clinic & iSport. He can be reached at 802.776.2242, or by email @ [MHowland@rrmc.org](mailto:MHowland@rrmc.org).