

Flexibility Challenge

Flexibility is an essential component of fitness and performance and is defined as the ability to move a joint or series of joints through a full unrestricted range of motion. Although essential, flexibility is also the fitness component that is most often ignored. While there is no research to indicate the actual act of stretching, especially before activity prevents injury, the ability to use the full range of motion at a joint is key to minimizing the wear and tear on joint surfaces. It doesn't even take very long. In fact, all of the major muscle groups of the lower extremity can be stretched in less than 10 minutes. The challenge comes in because it takes about a month of consistent stretching before noticeable improvements can be seen so most people give up when they don't see immediate improvement.

Different types of flexibility exercises can be incorporated into several different aspects of the workout plan and pre/post game routines. However, the best time to stretch to improve flexibility is after a workout (either a conditioning workout or a game). Immediately following a workout, muscles are warm and loose which makes it easier and more comfortable to make flexibility gains. This stretching should be done in a static manner. Static stretching means holding the stretch at the point of uncomfortable tension for 20-30 seconds. The uncomfortable tension should ease as the muscle respond to the stretch. At this point the muscles can be stretched a little farther, and flexibility gains will begin to occur.

This month, your challenge is to participate in some kind of stretching routine for a minimum of 10 minutes every day. This could be a simple static stretching routine following a workout or a game, or it could be participation in a more formal yoga or Pilates class.

Remember, it takes about a month of consistent stretching before noticeable improvements are seen so consistency and perseverance are key factors to success in this area.