

## ADVICE SHEET FOR STRETCHING

### THE IMPORTANCE OF STRETCHING

In general, stretching is seen as being used before and after exercising. However, stretching can be beneficial throughout the day for all individuals. If you are sitting in a position for an extended period of time, muscles become short and are tightened. Through stretching, it has the ability to lengthen and relax the tight muscles. Tight muscles can lead to pain and pressure, therefore it is important to stretch your body so it does not get to the point of aching.

Flexibility is one of the key components of a balanced fitness program, and one that many people ignore due to time constraints or being unsure of what to do. Without flexibility training (stretching), you are missing an important part of overall health. Flexibility prevents injury, increases your range of motion, promotes relaxation, improves performance and posture, reduces stress and keeps your body feeling loose and agile.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF STRETCHING

- Reduce risk for injury and pain
- Increases blood flow and so aids in the removal of unwanted waste products that could lead to cramping.
- Sends oxygen to your brain and helps you to have a clearer mind
- Improves muscle relaxation and flexibility by facilitating normal resting length, giving joints their full range of motion
- Enhances performances in physical activities

### HOW DO WE STRETCH

When stretching, it is important to know which muscles to focus on. Concentrate on major muscle groups that are commonly used such as your shoulders, lower back, and calves. If stretching during pre or post exercise, be sure to focus on the muscles that are used during that time. Consult with a Chartered Physiotherapist to create an individualized program based on your needs.

Types of stretches:

**Dynamic** – This type of stretching is used prior to exercise and if you have been sedentary for an extended period of time.

- Moving as you stretch
- Slow consistent movements and holding for up to 5 seconds, repeated 10-15 times.
- Lengthens and activates the muscle
- Improves body awareness to perform optimally
- Enhances muscular performance

- Examples:
  - Arm swings – swing both arms in complete rotation overhead several times
  - Torso twists – stand shoulder-width apart and twist torso from one side to the other
  - Leg swings – stand on one leg and swing other leg in a controlled motion to the front and back of you to get the full range of motion

**Static** - This type of stretching is deemed the safest and typically follows exercising as a cool-down period.

- Light stretch
- Takes muscle to its full length
- Holding position without discomfort for 10-30 seconds while motionless
- Examples:
  - Shoulder stretch – put right hand under left elbow and hold position across your chest
  - Hamstring stretch – place one foot on low stool, or position on an incline against the wall, and lean forward until you feel a stretch in the back of your thigh
  - Quadriceps stretch – stand on one foot and grab your other ankle while bending your knee and pulling your foot to your buttock until you feel a stretch in your front thigh

### TIPS FOR STRETCHING

- Be symmetrical: When stretching, it is important to be symmetrical with your movements. By making sure that both sides of your body have the same level of flexibility, it helps to decrease your risk of injury.
- Do not cause yourself pain: There will be tension when stretching, but it should not lead to pain. If you experience pain with a certain stretch, then you have pushed the stretch too far and should ease back on that movement.
- Do no bounce: Stretching should be a smooth movement. If you bounce then it can cause your muscle to become tighter, which is the opposite result of stretching.
- Stretch with warm muscles: If you stretch when your muscles are cold it reduces the positive effect.