

## **Fitness through Flexibility**

Many of us do our best to stay fit. There are many forms of exercise that we enjoy, and this is very individualized. Some people love to run or walk. Others enjoy weight lifting above anything else. Some are still active in recreational sports leagues such as softball, soccer, or basketball. In our clinic, I see all different kinds of active individuals. What I rarely see is someone who enthusiastically says, "I love to stretch." So I want to take a moment to discuss the importance of flexibility.

Flexibility is a key component to fitness. It even helps us to be stronger and more powerful athletes. Muscles are like rubber bands. The more you can stretch a rubber band, the quicker and stronger it snaps back. Therefore, a flexible muscle is more powerful. Flexible leg muscles will help you run faster and jump higher.

Flexibility helps prevent injury. A tight, inflexible muscle will more likely tear and fail when a quick stretch is applied to it during an athletic movement. A supple, flexible muscle can withstand an aggressive stretch without failing. In addition, flexibility throughout the body will allow us to maintain good posture and move athletically without compensating and putting stress on other joints in our body. Flexibility improves efficiency of movement.

Flexibility improves posture. In the clinic, I talk daily with people about the importance of posture. People who work in sedentary office jobs are susceptible to back and neck pain because of prolonged periods of postural stress on the body. Sitting all day reduces flexibility of the neck, chest, hip and thigh muscles. This in turn will make everyday movement more difficult and less efficient, causing more strain on the body when not at work. The changes are so slow that most people are unaware that they are even losing flexibility.

So I encourage everyone to stay active. But I encourage everyone to add stretching exercises to their exercise routine. A stretching routine, even done just twice a week, will allow you to become more flexible. You will feel better and move better. And you will stay in the game a little longer.

Doug Miller, PT, MSPT, SCS, Cert. MDT