

6 Times You Should Never Stretch

By [Judy Koutsky](#) Jun 28, 2016



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You have a recent injury.



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Sure, stretching might be a common part of [physical therapy](#), but if you've injured yourself in the past few days (or hours) you're probably better off resting. Otherwise, you risk exacerbating the injury, says Sheila Ghovanlou, a physical therapist at Providence Saint John's Health Center's Performance Therapy in Los Angeles. In particular, she says you should refrain from stretching any time you have acute muscle strain, acute ligament sprain, or nerve injury/damage. And it's definitely off-limits if you have sharp, consistent, or radiating pain. That's true even if you don't recall a specific injury. When in doubt, clear it with your doc or PT first.

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You've just had surgery.



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If you went under the knife—especially if you've had your Achilles tendon or hamstring repaired—don't think about stretching until you've spoken to your surgeon or physical therapist. "Studies show the importance of being aware of limitations with stretching; this allows tissue to heal and restore its function," says Ghovanlou. (Once you've healed, [get long and lean with sexy Flat Belly Yoga!](#))

You have muscle knots and/or spasms.



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Spasms are involuntary contractions in muscles, and trying to stretch them out simply won't work and could make the pain worse, says Ignatius Ajuebor, personal trainer and founder of [ANGEL Workout](#). Same goes if you have "myofascial trigger points," aka knots. It's smarter to try to release them with other forms of [massage](#), says Ajuebor.

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You're feeling cold.



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Whether it's really cold outside or your body just hasn't had a chance to warm up yet, stretching when you're chilly can cause unnecessary strain or even a muscle tear. "Your muscles stretch better when warm, so you decrease the likelihood of injury," says Ajuebor. Try walking or marching in place for a few minutes first.

You're already super flexible.



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Can you touch your thumb to your wrist? Or bend your pinkie backward to a 90-degree angle? If you're way more flexible than

most people then you shouldn't stretch without first getting guidance on how not to hurt yourself. "You might be suffering from stability issues—a lack of control in certain parts of your body like your hips," says Joscelyn Shumate Bourne, a doctor of physical therapy and certified strength and conditioning specialist at [Columbia Sports Physical Therapy](#) in New York City. She suggests consulting a movement specialist to learn about which exercises you should do as well as [those you should avoid](#) (which might include certain stretches).

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You're about to hit the field/court/ice.

Getting ready to play baseball, soccer, football or any other activity that requires fast, abrupt muscle force? Static stretching—slowly extending a muscle to its end range of motion—is a bad plan, says Joanne Donoghue, PhD, assistant professor at the New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine. "Research has shown that can increase your risk of injury," she says. Dynamic (aka active) stretching, however, is another story: "Active stretches stimulate and prepare muscles for use during exercise. They also increase heart rate, body temperature, and blood flow to help you move more efficiently," so it makes sense to incorporate them into your pre-game warm-up, says Donoghue. Arm swings, hip circles, and lunges are all examples of this type of safer stretching.

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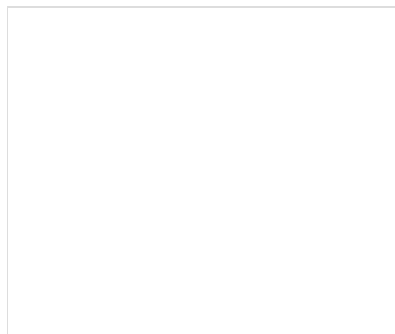
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