

Becoming Your Physical Best – Flexibility

Flexibility is the ability to move a joint through its complete range of motion. You might ask your child, “How well do you bend, stretch, and twist?” The goal is to develop and maintain normal joint range of motion. Being flexible can offer many benefits, including:

- Less muscle tension and more relaxation. Your child may sleep better.
- It is easier to move.
- Better coordination. Your child may perform better in sport or dance.
- Better range of motion. Your child can bend, stretch, and twist comfortably.
- Less risk of injury.
- Better body awareness and posture, less low back pain and other spinal problems.
- Improved circulation and breathing.
- Muscles contract, or work, better.
- Less muscle soreness.
- Look and feel better.

How Much Is Enough?

Gentle stretching, as described in this newsletter, is hard to overdo. However, if your child expresses discomfort during a stretch, encourage him or her to back off a bit. If your child experiences general muscle aches, he or she should do less stretching and stretch less far overall until another day when feeling better. Encourage your child to do a variety of safe stretches at least twice a week to get some

flexibility benefits. This newsletter offers a few suggestions. Your child’s physical education teacher may also provide other resources.

Flexibility Safety

Each stretch should be:

- Slow and steady—no bouncing.
- Taken only to the point of mild discomfort then backed off a bit.
- Held for 10-30 seconds. Bouncing while stretching is *only* for specialized stretching with more physically mature individuals than elementary children, and then only under trained supervision. In addition, elementary- aged children should not have another individual force them into position. Please do not allow either of these types of stretching. Finally, keep in mind that having too much mobility makes injury more likely. It is just as bad as having too little. If you notice that your child seems to have an abnormal amount of flexibility (seems “double-jointed”), consult with your child’s health care provider.





Family Fun

No matter your age, doing flexibility exercises can be part of a positive bedtime routine. Right after all the teeth are brushed and pajamas are on, lead, or let your child lead, your family through 3 to 4 safe stretches. Your children learned stretching exercises that work different areas of the body. Have them show you!

Parents' Corner

Flexibility is a driving force behind achieving physical fitness in all other health-related areas. A person with healthy flexibility can participate more safely and accurately in physical activity. This helps him or her develop better aerobic fitness, muscular strength and endurance, and body composition. End the day

with less stress as you send the stretched out kids to bed.

Kids' Corner

Stretching makes you feel good. Work on your flexibility whenever you can.

It All Hinges on This (K-3)

Joints help connect bones together. Your elbows, knees, knuckles, and ankles are some of your joints. When you are flexible, your joints can move like they were made to move—through their full range of motion. Some of your joints are like hinges. They move back and forth. Point to a hinge on a door, can you name one or two joints that move like hinges? (Sample answers: elbow; knee.) Some of your joints move like a spoon that fits tightly in a bowl. They can circle around. Can you name one or two joints that move that way? (Sample answers: shoulder; hip.)

Stress Relievers (4th-5th grades)

Working on your flexibility regularly will not only help you move more safely, it may also help you feel more relaxed and calm. Before your next test, try these two stretches while sitting at your desk. Be sure it's OK with your teacher first, though. Breathe deeply as you stretch, puffing out your stomach when you breathe in, to become even calmer.