Stretching

The invention of new recovery techniques such as the Theragun, cryotherapy, and foam rolling have allowed stretching to take a backseat to newer and sexier forms of rehab. Another added benefit of newer techniques is that they save time. Most stretching routines can take anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes depending on the intensity severity and frequency. Cryotherapy typically only takes 2 to 5 minutes and foam rolling can be done between five and 10 minutes. Unfortunately, though both address some of the issues that lead to soreness and longer lasting injuries and imbalances, neither can fix the tight connective tissues that are apparent after the physical stresses of resistance and intense cardio training.

Love it or hate it, there is no better treatment for muscular fatigue and impact than stretching. According to Harvard, stretching keeps muscles stronger, healthier, and obviously more flexible, allowing for more motion at the joints and allowing for the extension and contraction of muscles when they are called to be used. This prevents the overuse of extra or secondary muscles such as a lower back when areas like the hips and hamstrings are unable to reach their full extension or contraction.

When

Your body will typically let you know where you need to stretch, but this is not always the case. The bigger in question that needs to be answered first, when to stretch. Physical therapists such as an ATI recommend stretching pre-workout to prevent injury and increase range of motion. Other resources, such as Healthline, say that post workout stretching is more beneficial since you're stretching warmer muscles that have established good blood flow.

How

No matter the case, when stretching, you should have a lower intensity and the hold time should be around 20 seconds. This means that on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is excruciating to hold a stretch, you should be holding between a two and a five. Pre-workout stretching should be closer to a two, while post workout can be up to a five. This is because stretching pre-workout with inadequate blood flow and aggressive holds can put micro tears in the muscle and the connective tissue that can lead to injury and limit recovery from future workouts. Most studies have shown that pre-workout

stretching has little to no benefit while post workout stretching does help to increase future mobility and decrease delayed onset muscle soreness.

Where

Since your body will typically tell you where you need to stretch, is it safe to assume that when your neck is tight you should stretch your neck? Or if your lower back is tight should you stretch your lower back? Therein lies the gray area that no one tells you about. Typically, when soft tissue areas with little to no bone structure get tight, stretching them further will only lengthen the nerves and increase any existing nerve pain, while also causing the muscles to tighten up more to reinforce the pre-stretch range of motion. Simply put, your lower back likes to have a certain range of motion between the top of the pelvis in the bottom of the rib cage. When that length is increased, your back will tighten to bring it back to its desired resting range of motion. This is where we have spasms and tightness occurring post workout. If we were to stretch this area, it will only tighten further. So, what are we to do?

When stretching soft tissue areas that have little to no support, we must stretch the sympathetic areas. In a case of the lower back, 60-70% of the time the lack of range of motion in the hips and hamstrings are causing lengthening of the lower back to compensate for this lack of mobility. This means that if we stretch the hamstring and hips, the lower back will stay at its desired range of motion and be less likely to tighten up. In the case of a tight neck, we want to be sure to stretch the shoulders and lats. This is because we typically are using our traps and upper back muscles to compensate for friction at the shoulder joint, or in the simplest case is a bad night's sleep.

So when in doubt stretch and if you are ever unsure of where or what to stretch, be sure to reach out to us at info@e3strength.com or visit www.e3strength.com.

References

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