

A flexible future

We're constantly hearing about the benefits of keeping active but what about stretching – is it really just an important part of a workout? Advanced Personal Trainer, Shenda Falvey, explains

Flexibility, the measure of the maximum range of movement around a joint, is the most under-rated component of health and fitness. Muscular strength, muscular endurance, cardiovascular fitness and motor skills, get all the attention, yet there are many benefits of regular stretching.

Lack of flexibility makes the body stiff and less mobile, leading to bad posture, restriction in everyday movements and joint pain. Although stretching is commonly

performed at the beginning of exercise to help prepare muscles, and at the end to reduce soreness, it should also be incorporated into our daily routine. Stretching when getting out of bed or after sitting for long periods, for example, will help ease tight muscles while improving mobility and flexibility.

So why not try out the following standing stretches? Warm up, start with feet hip-width apart and hold for 20 seconds.

PECTORALIS MAJOR (CHEST)

Clasp hands behind back and extend arms, squeezing shoulder blades together.

BENEFITS: Realigns shoulder girdle and reduces kyphotic posture (forward rounding of shoulders) and compression of lungs.

ERECTOR SPINAE (BACK)

Place hands in between legs, clasping above knee. Arch back and hang head.

BENEFITS: Relieves backache, reduces stiffness of shoulders and increases mobility of spine.

QUADRICEPS (FRONT OF UPPER THIGH)

Raise foot to bottom and hold by ankle, ensuring knees are aligned. Use wall for support if necessary.

BENEFITS: Improves balance and posture, realigns pelvis, reduces aching of lower back and strengthens standing leg.

HAMSTRING (BACK OF UPPER THIGH)

Take a small step forward, keeping the front stretching leg straight. Pivot from the waist, ensuring your back remains straight. Rest your hands on the thigh of back bent leg.

BENEFITS: Improves posture, realigns pelvis and reduces aching of lower back.



» *Why is it important to eat plenty of fruit and veg?*

They contain essential vitamins and minerals that are important for good health.

They also play an important role in bowel function, such as preventing constipation.

They can help to protect against stroke, heart disease, high blood pressure, some cancers.

High in fibre and low in calories, they are not only essential in our diet, but can help us maintain a healthy weight.