When Stretching is a Bad Idea by James Hopkin

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The cool weather is upon us and the urge to stay cuddled-up warm and cozy under the covers can be pretty strong. But this is the time of year many try to start anew with resolutions to get in shape and lose weight.

So, you tumble out of bed into a gym or outside for a run and lo and behold â€“ sore muscles! Immediately you might think â€œHmmâ€¦I need to stretch that out.â€• Wait! While stretching is a necessar part of your daily exercise routine, itâ€™s not always the best thing to do right off the bat. So here are some guidelines that will help you gauge when to stretch and how to do it.

Do not stretch when:

â€¢ Muscles are cold or, in other words, are not receiving very much blood flow. This is how muscles are pulled/strained.

â€¢ You feel that you may have pulled or strained a muscle. You need to let those muscle fibers heal. You have just torn, in all likelihood, a small amount of muscle and in that process the muscle was overstretched. The last thing you want to immediately do is start stretching. A good rule of thumb is to wait 7 days before you start stretching again or consult your local physician or physical therapist to figure out the severity of the strain.

Stretching guidelines:

â€¢ Always warm-up before you exercise. For some of you that can be as simple as walking a Â¼ to Â½ mile before you launch into a run or jog. For others, that can simply mean moist heat or heating pad to the stiff joint prior to exercise.

If you are having trouble getting warm before you exercise try these simple drills:

â€¢ Partial squats x 20

Stand with feet shoulder width apart and bend knees slightly keeping your knees from going over toes (in other words, stick your bottom out a little bit).

â€¢ High knees x 20

Lift your knees as high as you can as if you are running in place. Vary the speed based on your ability level but always start out slow, with out bouncing, to give your muscles a chance to warm-up to the move.

â€¢ Butt kicks x 20

Lift your heel to your buttocks and bend your knees as much as you can as if you are trying to touch your heels to your bottom with every step. Vary the speed based on your ability level. Start out slow, without bouncing, to give your muscles a chance to warm-up to the move.

â€¢ Wear more clothing

Okay, this is self explanatory but you will be surprised how many people donâ€™t layer their clothing for

outdoor exercise. Also, you may want to add more clothing around a stiff joint.

2. Stretch after you exercise. Cold weather can cause muscles to shorten and you need to maintain normal muscle length for normal muscle function.

â€¢ A stretching program should incorporate the main muscle groups and should not cause pain.

â€¢ For runners - Iliotibial band stretching with a foam roll, quadriceps, hamstrings, calf and hip flexor stretching are a must.

â€¢ If you are not sure how to stretch, consult your local physical therapist, certified athletic trainer or even a sports medicine doctor.

If the cold weather is sapping your motivation along with your body heat, rev-up your workouts by trying different indoor training opportunities. Local spin classes, personal training, group classes all offer a variety and challenge that can be just what your body needs to get through the winter fit and fabulous for the summer season. Foothills Acceleration and Sports Training (FAST) facilities offer personal training, group classes and more. Go online to www.fast-training.com for more information.

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