

I'M SUPPOSED TO WHAT.....? STRETCH?

Oh, the “little” things of being an athlete that we are supposed to do, and not for anyone else but the benefit of ourselves and bodies. One of the big ones is stretching. It doesn't count as training; it takes a bit of time out of your day and can be a subtle reminder of how much you DON'T do it. I know this sounds discouraging, however I've decided to put it all out on the table to hopefully convince at least one person (and remind the others), how wonderful it is for our bodies and how much it can improve performance.



Stretching and flexibility have been one of those activities I've had trouble maintaining on a regular bases for, well... ever. I would mostly only do it when I felt really tight or someone else told me it was a good idea. I would then make a little promise to myself that I'd be mighty and “stretch every day” or “be *this* flexible by Christmas.” Those promises never lasted more than a week and I was right back to square one. It wasn't until I started thinking about stretching in a different light that it has begun to stick. I now actually enjoy treating my muscles to its benefits on a regular basis and feel good about myself for that fact that I make it happen.

This new light for me was mobility. *Mobility: the quality of being mobile. Mobile: having freedom of movement, capable of moving or being readily moved (English Word Dictionary).* When we don't stretch often our muscles fall back into their natural ability to move within a certain range. If that range of motion is small then our muscles don't have a lot of “freedom.” The greater the range of motion, the greater the ability to move.

Range of motion is different for everyone so flexibility is unique to each individual. Skiing, specifically, demands our bodies to kick back, flex our ankles or move our hips in a technical way to exert and gain as much power and momentum as we are capable of. I started thinking how stretching can help my body get into these positions and forms in the easiest way possible. The less I have to force my limbs to reach where I ask of them, the lesser the chance for injury and the greater the chance of finding speed.

There are a few ways I got going with this stretching business and started making it a part of my day:

- That really is the way you have to think about it, that it's **part of your day**. Just like napping or eating or showering. Make time, allot time.

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- **Take a class.** I know this sounds crazy because we all learned how to stretch in the 3rd grade, but there are classes offered at gyms, community centers and yoga studios that will help mix it up and introduce new ways of stretching. Thanks to our team sponsor P.U.S.H, we have access to a great one called Flex. Even yoga classes help!
- **Leave your mat, foam roller and bands out in the open.** Luckily I live with other skiers so they don't mind if this stuff is strewn across the living room floor. If it's in your view daily you will use it more often. Otherwise it really is just cluttering the floor.
- **Hold it!** I forced myself not to rush through it in order to get the most out of it. I hold stretches for at least 30 seconds. A complete stretch and foam roll takes me about an hour... I had a lot of work to do.
- **Watch tv.** I got hooked on a show and would watch an episode while I stretch. It feels more productive than just mindlessly watching television. And you are going to sit through the whole episode anyways. Why not stretch!
- **The 2-week hurdle.** I find it took two weeks to get into the habit or doing it every day, or a complete, full-body stretch every second day with smaller focuses in between. Depends on your schedule!

It sounds so simple and trivial to an athlete but it was something I really had to work on. I suggest giving it a valid effort if it's something you believe is worth it or have had trouble doing. As athletes we push our bodies every day and knot up those muscle more frequently. Everyday you don't stretch your body naturally retracts itself. Stretch and you will feel better in the long run!

Happy Stretching!