

Stretching & Strengthening

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Remedial Exercise: Helping You Heal Faster

Remedial exercises are used to improve your body's health. They are useful for rehabilitation after an injury or simply as part of your overall wellness plan. Your health care provider may ask you to do exercises at home, or they may be used during your treatments.

In general, there are four primary types of remedial exercise: Range of Motion, Stretching, Strengthening, and Cardiovascular. Most conditions will be given a combination of at least stretching and strengthening exercises, although many will be given components of all four.

In order to understand how remedial exercises work, it is important to understand how the body's musculoskeletal system works.

Every joint in the body has multiple muscles working to stabilize and/or move it. While some muscles are working to move your joints, others will work to stabilize them or slow the movements. This ensures that movements are smooth and controlled, and helps prevent injury.

Stretching — When and How?

As you are probably already aware, stretching lengthens tissue. If your range of motion is restricted by shortened muscles, ligaments, tendons, or fascia, your health care team may ask you to do stretches at home. You will be shown proper stretching techniques and given stretches relevant to your condition. Additionally, stretching is a beneficial part of any general fitness plan.

Tips for Proper Stretching:

- Don't bounce. Bouncing will only cause your muscles to tighten further. Move smoothly and hold the stretch for 30 seconds.
- Don't overstretch. Position yourself

so the stretch is comfortable, not maximal.

- Pain while stretching is never good. If you feel pain, you're either stretching too far or too soon after an injury.
- Relax and breathe deeply. This allows your muscles to relax and get the maximum benefits from the stretch.

Do note that stretching is **contraindicated** if acute inflammation is present. You may be advised to stretch other structures related to your condition, but inflamed structures need to rest and heal. Like with any fitness program, please talk to your health care team before starting a stretching program.

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"In general, a client recovers more rapidly and completely from a condition or injury when she participates actively in the healing process through a self-care plan." — Fiona Rattray, Clinical Massage Therapy

Strengthening — Instead of Stretching?

It's not uncommon for people to ask how stretching and strengthening work within a fitness or rehabilitation plan. When do you stretch, and when do you strengthen? The truth is that they are complimentary exercises and should usually be done together!

As the name suggests, strengthening exercises are used to build strength within your muscles, especially if they are weak and unable to function in your activities of daily life. Strength isn't just something athletes and bodybuilders need — everyone can benefit from a good weight training program. These benefits include:

- Increased Metabolic Rate
- Increasing and Restoring Bone Mass

- Increased Lean Muscle Mass and Muscle Strength, Power, and Endurance
- Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation
- Improved Balance, Flexibility, Mobility and Stability
- Makes You Feel and Look Better!

So how does this fit in with stretching? Muscles work best when they are at their proper length. If a muscle is chronically shortened, it will not have its full range-of-motion, and will not be able to gain its optimal strength through weight training. This is why muscles need both in order to function at their best. Normally, you need to stretch first and then start your strength training later. Often, patients will start strength

training first, and this will lead to problems.

Do note that you should **always talk to your health care provider about any weight training program, especially if you have sustained an injury.** You may need to wait a few weeks before starting with weights, or you may need to work only specific muscle groups and not others. The team here at Back To Health would be happy to discuss any fitness program with you!



Pilates? Yoga? How do I choose?

Pilates and Yoga seem to be the 'in' things to do right now. Both are excellent ways to build core strength and flexibility while helping your posture. Both are widely offered at many gyms and fitness studios. So how do you choose?

The difference between the two is their focus and philosophy. Yoga of any kind tends to concentrate more on flexibility and less on building strength, even though it does enhance both. Exercises are done on the floor or on a mat, and your body weight is used to provide the resistance.

Pilates, on the other hand, is the opposite — building core strength and concentrating less on flexibility. Exercises are done on a mat as well as a variety of equipment, including ex-

ercise balls and machines.

Philosophically, yoga tries to provide a balanced body in physical, mental, and spiritual ways. Not only will you be strengthening and stretching, but most yoga classes will also teach breathing technique, ways to reduce stress and some elements of spiritual philosophy, depending on what type of class you are taking. Pilates rarely delves into the spiritual, tending to focus only on the physical wellness aspect. It teaches breathing technique, mental concentration, and movement.

So choosing one activity over the other really depends on what you are looking for. If you want to concentrate on flexibility, want to find something for stress management, and don't mind spiritual discussions, Yoga

may be for you. If you're more interested in strengthening your core (especially toning your abs!) and aren't really interested in the relaxation and spiritual aspects of Yoga, Pilates is probably your better choice.

Remember that it is just as important to strengthen your core as it is to strengthen your limbs. Both Pilates and Yoga are good choices for developing core strength and flexibility.