

Do Stretching & Strength Exercises



CHALLENGE
Strengthen
& stretch on
alternating days
this month.

Requirements to Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read “Why do I need to do strength exercises,” “Why do I need to stretch,” and “Exercises that do both.”
2. To complete the Challenge, you must do general strengthening exercises (e.g., weight lifting, calisthenics, or Pilates) at least 2 times a week and on alternating days, stretch to improve flexibility and relaxation – for a total of at least 22 days this month.
3. Use your monthly Health Challenge Calendar to keep track.
4. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

Why do I need to do strength exercises?

Muscle strength is an important part of fitness. It improves body shape and function. Strength training can build stronger muscles and bones, strengthen connective tissues, reduce the risk of low back pain, high blood pressure, and diabetes, and help control body weight.

Research has shown that exercise can slow the physiological aging clock. While aerobic exercise (e.g., walking, jogging, or swimming) has many excellent health benefits, lifting weights 2 or 3 times a week increases strength by building muscle mass and bone density.

Strength exercises are safe and effective for women and men of all ages, including those who are not in perfect health. In fact, people with health concerns – including heart disease or arthritis – can also benefit from an exercise program that includes lifting weights a few times each week, when done properly. Strength training, particularly in conjunction with regular aerobic exercise, can also have a profound impact on your mental and emotional health.

If you have heart problems, high blood pressure, or joint pain, you should avoid heavy lifting. Instead, use lighter weights and do more repetitions. This results in less strain.

General strengthening guidelines

- **Do strength-building exercises** – such as weight lifting, push-ups, and sit-ups – at least 2–3 times each week on nonconsecutive days.
- **Choose exercises that strengthen all the major muscle groups** of the body: arms, shoulders, chest, back, abdomen, hips, thighs, and lower legs.
- **Start with an exercise you can do at least 6–12 times**, or weights you can lift at least 6–12 times, before becoming fatigued. When the exercise or weight-lifting becomes easy, add more repetitions or weights to continue building strength.
- **Use good form when you lift weights.** Go through a full range of motion. Go steady, in a controlled manner, not jerky.
- **Perform one set of each exercise** to the point of intentional fatigue while maintaining good form. If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or cardiovascular disease, lower your intensity. Stop your lift when the exercise becomes difficult, well before you reach the furthest you can go.
- **Don't hold your breath when you exercise.** It can greatly increase your blood pressure. Breathe out when you lift or contract. Breathe in when you relax the muscle.
- **Allow a short rest time between each exercise** so you can do the next exercise in good form.
- **If possible, have a fitness trainer show you how** to get started safely and correctly. If you are exercising at a gym, find a trainer to show you how to use the gym equipment correctly.
- **If possible, exercise with a training partner** who can provide feedback, assistance, and motivation.
- **Start at easy levels when you first begin.** That will help prevent muscle soreness – a natural consequence of doing an activity that your muscles are not used to. It is also a sign that they will be getting stronger.



It's not necessary to do all of the strengthening exercises for each part of your body at each session. Choose 8–10 exercises you enjoy doing that cover all of the major muscle groups. Vary the exercises from time to time to add variety and work other muscles.

Why do I need to stretch?

Flexibility allows you to scratch your back or bend down to pick up your shoes from the floor. It's the range of motion a joint (or group of joints) can achieve without being injured. Doing stretching exercises on a regular basis can help you maintain flexibility and a good range of motion in the major joints. It can also improve circulation, relieve stress, and make it easier for you to perform activities of daily living (e.g., house-keeping, gardening, and shopping).



General stretching guidelines

- **Stretch immediately following an aerobic activity** while muscles are still warm and pliable.
- **Stretch all major muscle groups:** neck, shoulders, back, hips, and legs.
- **Slowly stretch to a full range** of motion without pain.
- **Avoid bouncing** or fast movements.
 - **Hold each stretch** for 15–30 seconds to get the maximum benefit.
 - **Do 2–4 stretches** per muscle group.
 - **Aim for at least 2 stretching sessions a week.**
 - **Avoid stretches that cause pain in a joint.**
 - **Remember to breathe** while stretching!

Stretching might also prevent serious injury, according to a study comparing the incidence, cost, and severity of joint injuries in stretchers versus nonstretchers.⁽¹⁾ After just 6 months, firefighters who participated in a stretching program were more flexible than those who didn't stretch. While the two groups experienced about the same number of injuries in the 2-year follow-up, the total dollars spent because of injuries was \$85,372 for stretchers versus \$235,131 for nonstretchers. The stretchers had fewer medical costs and were able to return to work (and, presumably, resume normal activities) much sooner than those who didn't stretch.

Flexibility is necessary for you to perform a variety of tasks requiring bending, twisting, and reaching.

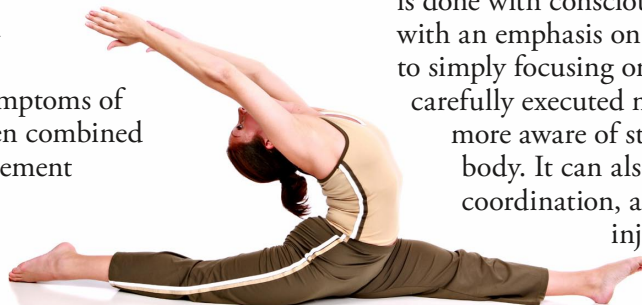
But that doesn't mean you should strive to be a contortionist! Extreme flexibility is associated with a higher incidence of muscular injury. So is inflexibility. A moderate level of flexibility – one that lets you engage in normal activities with ease – is the goal.

Download a handout describing useful strengthening exercises, at www.wellsource.info/handout/strength.pdf and a handout on stretching exercises at www.wellsource.info/handout/stretch.pdf

Exercises that do both

Stretching classes have gained increasing popularity. They can be a gentle form of exercise that can help you maintain and improve flexibility, mobility, muscle tone, and strength. At the same time, they can help you relax. The health benefits of **yoga** are becoming more apparent as its clinical applications are studied in medical and research settings. There are studies to suggest that yoga exercises can help:

- Reduce stress, anxiety, and irritability
- Improve or stabilize the symptoms of coronary heart disease when combined with diet and stress management
- Reduce blood pressure
- Increase and maintain mobility in patients with



osteoarthritis (OA) as well as help lessen the pain and other accompanying symptoms of OA

Pilates is a series of conditioning exercises that combine stretching, elongating, strengthening, and breathing. This form of exercise has become popular for its low-stress approach to building strength and increasing flexibility, and its emphasis on balance and posture. Pilates exercise is done with conscious attention to each movement and with an emphasis on quality and precision, as opposed to simply focusing on the number of repetitions. These carefully executed movements can help you become more aware of strengths and weaknesses in your body. It can also help you achieve greater balance, coordination, and symmetry, and help you to avoid injury in day-to-day activities.

References:

- (1) *Journal of Occupational Medicine*. 1990;32(7):631-637;
(2) *American College of Sports Medicine*; (3) *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*.





Do Stretching & Strength Exercises

Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record each day you do stretching or strength exercises.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you did stretching or strength exercises. You must meet this goal at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this practice for a lifetime of good health and wellbeing.
4. Turn in your Health Challenge™ form if requested, or enter your completion of this Challenge on the Health Activity Tracker report for the month, if applicable. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

CHALLENGE
Strengthen & stretch on alternating days this month.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____		
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____		
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____		
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____		
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____		

_____ Number of days this month I did stretching or strength exercises

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking

Other wellness projects completed this month:

Name _____ Date _____

