

## Outdoors health tips from the Posse:

# Take a stretch

In my younger days, I played a fair amount of baseball and hockey. I remember my coaches preaching relentlessly for us to do our stretches and a warm-up before every game or practice. I always thought this was a ridiculous idea and avoided it whenever possible.



**Mark Rackay**  
Tips from the Posse

Doing a warm-up before exercise made no sense to me. I would get plenty warm once the exercise started. Same with the stretching to “get loose.” I always figured that I would get plenty loose once the game got going. It made as much sense to me as practicing to go to bed early, which was something every kid hates.

Now that I have advanced a little in years, I have readdressed the whole issue of stretching and warming-up. I have found myself suffering from some heel pain whenever I take my morning run. The pain will appear for the first 10 minutes, then leave. This pain will come back during the day if I stand too long. Anytime I sit for a few minutes, standing up becomes a whole new experience in pain and stiffness.

I was amazed to learn that my ailment is fairly common. The doctor told me that the cure is simple, but the prescription must be followed religiously. I agreed, and he explained the course of treatment. The treatment and cure consisted of stretching.

The doc explained to me that as we get older, we should concentrate less on muscle and bodybuilding, and more on flexibility for our muscles and joints. I am not sure what he meant by older, but I am positive he was not referring to me.

At first, I thought my doc's train of thought left the station without him. I was not even going to try such nonsense, rather, I'll hold out for a pill or something. I must admit, however, after several weeks of stretching, his cure was spot on.

Before any workout, or physical outdoor activity, a good stretching of the muscles you are going to use is a good idea. Stretching allows the body to become more flexible and less prone to injury.

Recently, there has been some discussion amongst the physical trainers that a stretch before a workout is not necessary. Some feel



**Before you take that hike with a backpack up to Horseshoe Lake (shown here) better do some stretches.** (Photo courtesy of CPWW)

that the warm up is sufficient and would rather leave the stretching until after the workout. I am not in that camp because they still have not sold me on the warm-up idea yet. I am kind of hard headed that way.

If your lower body were going to get a workout, such as running, hiking or biking, you would want to stretch out the hamstrings, quadriceps, glutes and calf muscles. With heel problems, pay special attention to the calf muscles. These stretches should be performed while standing, and each one held for around 10 seconds.

What is equally important is to stretch after the workout or activity. Stretches should be performed to get the muscles back to their normal length. A proper set of stretches may also prevent potential muscle soreness.

If your activity or workout were for an extended period of time, such as a long hike, a stretch break would be a good idea along with your water stops.

Stretching reduces muscle tension while

making the body feel more relaxed. A stretched muscle resists muscle strains better than a not stretched muscle, largely because stretching helps increase blood circulation in the muscle group.

A good set of stretches is also good for the joints but people with osteoporosis or certain types of arthritis should not stretch. If you feel joint pain, or movement is limited by pain, it is best not to stretch and seek medical advice.

I will throw this out there about stretches for seniors (even though it does not include me). As we age, flexibility is what it is all about. With flexibility comes better balance, and with better balance, we reduce risk of falls and other injuries.

We should all take part in maintenance stretching. Research has shown that stretching three times a week, for 15 to 20 minutes a day, will improve mobility. This is in addition to your normal workout routine.

When doing maintenance stretches, fo-

cus on the major muscle groups such as the shoulders and neck, calves and thighs, hips and back. Try and stretch evenly on each side and hold for 20 to 30 seconds. Move slowly into the stretch and avoid bouncing like you see the athletes on television do. As with any exercise, concentrate on your breathing and never hold your breath during an exercise.

I have noticed that the little pains don't heal quite as fast as they used to. Stretching helps me prevent some of those little pains. Until someone tells me otherwise, I am going to keep acting like a kid playing baseball. Coach still has not sold me on that whole warm-up idea yet. ●

*Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and an avid hunter who travels all across North America in search of adventure, and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org).*

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