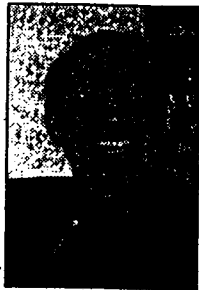


## Stretching... the truth

Stretching is a natural phenomenon. We all do it periodically, mostly after we've stayed in the same position for a prolonged time. The unconscious desire to stretch is particularly strong the first thing after getting up from sleep. Stretching has also been shown to keep our tendons and ligaments sup-

ple. Aging and diseases, such as diabetes mellitus, ultimately cause these structures to be less flexible. In older age, increasing the body's flexibility may mean the difference between falling and bruising a hip compared to breaking it.

We have also been told that it is important to stretch before exercise to avoid injuries.



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However, the latest information, according to an article in last month's "British Medical Journal", states that stretching before exercise may be nothing more than a wasted effort. In this meta-analysis, data is pooled from several medical trials which increase the numbers of subjects and gives extra power to the several studies in the pooled data. At the University of Sydney, Dr. Rob Herbert concluded there were no beneficial effects in stretching either before or after exercise that included: for muscle soreness, risk of injury or athletic performance. In the studies involving stretching for 5-10 minutes per session, there was a minimal, but nevertheless, statistical difference which could be interpreted that to stretch for a bout of jogging might prevent one injury in 23 years for the exercising adult.

I have been exercising, particularly jogging and resistance workouts, for the last 35 years. Periodically, throughout my exercising career, I would

sometimes stretch before, sometimes after, and rarely both, with a run. For the last several years, I have not stretched at all since the literature has not shown much benefit from this endeavor.

Personally, there has been no difference in my muscular and skeletal health, despite the fact that I am now in my 60's rather than my 20's. This is not to minimize the effects of stretching exercises on a routine basis for all of us -- stretching keeps us limber and makes us feel better. The latter may be due to a kinesthetic reflex that releases endorphins, the "feel-good" hormones, in our brains.

Despite the lack of science to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that stretching is a good addition to exercise, it is at the least, not bad, and each of us must decide what is best for our well-being. However, there is no doubt in my mind that periodic stretching for the non-exercising adult is extremely beneficial and I, medically, recommend it.