



# Ultimate Guide to Flexibility

## What is flexibility?

Oxford Languages defines flexibility as “the quality of bending easily without breaking.”

More importantly, what do you define flexibility as?

Is it to be able to touch your toes or to become a contortionist for Cirque du Soleil?

Knowing what your definition of what being flexible looks like will help you to achieve your goals.

## Flexibility, mobility, range of motion- what’s the difference?

At WeStretch, we use these words a lot, and while they are similar, they all have different meanings.

**Flexibility** is basically how bendable you are without pain.

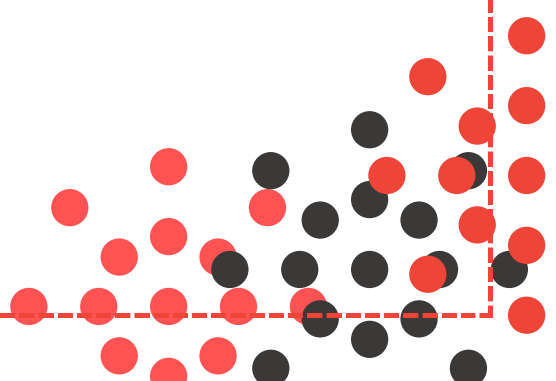
E.G. Being able to touch your toes.

**Mobility** is how easily you can move through daily tasks.

E.G. Getting up off the floor and walking freely.

**Range of motion** is how far a specific joint can move safely and without pain.

E.G. How far your neck can turn from side to side.



## The benefits of flexibility.

### For athletes

Flexibility allows athletes a better understanding of their bodies and limits. It helps them to identify any potential areas of concern before they start exercising, and it allows them to improve elements of their sport outside of traditional training.

Improving flexibility can improve a golfer's swing, allow a swimmer to gain more power as they dive into the water, and help dancers to gracefully kick higher in performances.

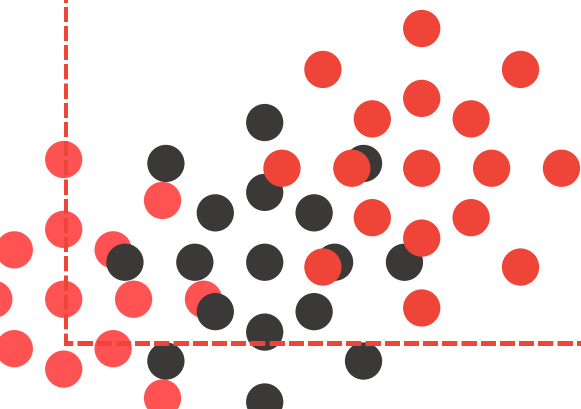
Flexibility training also helps to prevent injuries and encourage a faster recovery after exercise. Stretching allows muscles to loosen and lengthen, and it improves circulation through the joints, clearing out lactic acid and old blood, while bringing fresh nutrients and oxygen.

### For parents

Stretching and flexibility training is a great way to fit exercise into their days and to boost energy levels. There is no need to commit to an expensive gym membership or an hour-long workout class.

The best part of stretching is that it is a physical activity that you can easily do with your children. Show them how to take just a few moments to properly stretch out their bodies to feel their best.

It is easy to get caught up in the thought process that exercise needs to be long and hard, but for the average parent, that isn't feasible. Instead, take small stretching breaks of 5-10 minutes throughout the day to improve your flexibility and overall quality of life.



## For people with chronic conditions and aging bodies.

It is common for those with chronic pain, disabilities, or aging bodies to become more sedentary. This often leads to shorter and tighter muscles, which in turn can magnify the pain. Many traditional exercise outlets can be out of reach, which is why flexibility exercises are the perfect starting point.

Stretching helps to build functional strength, which helps with everyday activities like getting up off the floor and improving balance. It can be tailored to each individual's fitness levels, which isn't an option with most other activities, especially for people with disabilities.

Flexibility is a great starting point in allowing someone to move without assistance, without fear of falling, and with less pain.

## Keys to improving your flexibility.

### Start warmed up.

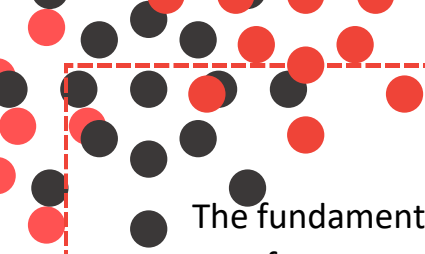
Your muscles are most elastic when they are warm. Before you do any flexibility exercises, make sure your body is adequately warm. This can be doing some light exercises, such as walking or dancing, or stretching after a hot bath. This will prevent injuries and expedite your flexibility gains.

Think of gaining flexibility like trying to pull a piece of taffy. If you leave it outside in winter and then try to pull on it, chances are that it won't have much give and will snap easily. However, if you leave the taffy in your pocket on a hot day and then try to pull it, it will stretch quite easily and without resistance.

### Repetition and hold times.

Repetition is the key to improving blood flow and increasing your range of motion, but if you've tried the different WeStretch routines, you may have noticed that there are different repetitions and hold times for specific routines.

Warm-up and aerobic-style routines often just use short holds and do each pose once. This is simply to get your body moving and to get your heart pumping faster.



The fundamental routine will repeat each pose six times, but the hold time will vary from two seconds when you're first starting out, to seven seconds as your body progresses. This significantly improves your range of motion and basic flexibility so that your quality-of-life increases, but this won't necessarily afford you to do the splits.

If you are wanting significant flexibility gains, follow our sport improvement routine patterns. The first time you do a pose in one of these routines, it is only for a brief hold, to activate and begin warming up the muscles. After your muscles have been primed and ready, you will continue by cycling through three repetitions of each stretch, held for 7-30 seconds. This gives your body time to allow the muscle to lengthen and relax into each stretch, with each repetition enabling you to stretch a bit further.

When you immediately jump into longer and more intense stretches without adequate warm up, your muscles aren't ready, and you pose a risk of serious injury.

If you ever feel pain while you're stretching, stop immediately, and seek medical help. It is possible to stretch for too long, which is why WeStretch never holds a stretch for longer than 30 seconds.

Flexibility stretches are best done either after a workout or separately. Longer stretches before exercising can cause a decrease in power and strength, which can affect things such as jumping or throwing ability. Just as how your body needs to recover after a strenuous workout, you need time to rest and adapt after a flexibility session.

### Use a variety of different stretches.

There are about 600 muscles in the human body, interconnected and intertwined with each other. Doing many different stretches allows you to be able to work as many muscles as possible.

If you always do the same three stretches to solve your hip pain, chances are that you are not accessing the root of the problem. Variety is the key to discovering

and solving any problem areas that are holding your flexibility back. Ask your physiotherapist or chiropractor for additional stretches to work on or download WeStretch to access our inventory of 5,500 different stretches.

There are a few different styles of stretching out there, but the two most common are static stretching and dynamic (or active) stretching. Static stretching is essentially where you hold a pose to lengthen muscles and dynamic stretching is moving a joint or muscle through a continuous range of motion to activate and lengthen.

There is an additional style of stretching that carries a greater risk of injury, and that is ballistic stretching. Ballistic stretching is when you bounce in a stretch, which bypasses your body's safety mechanisms that prevent your muscles from going too far. Only attempt this type of stretching when it is recommended and supervised by a medical professional.

### Plan and set goals.

The best way to get serious about improving your flexibility is to set a consistent time of day to stretch. You can make sure you get your stretching in by stretching as soon as you wake up or you can stretch before bed to release tension so that you can sleep better. It truly is whatever works best for you.

It is also better to start small and grow over time versus starting big and stopping almost immediately. Ten minutes a day is a great starting place, but if that is too much for you, just remember that even five minutes of stretching in a day is more beneficial than none at all.

As for goal planning, you might have heard of SMART goals before- goals that are:

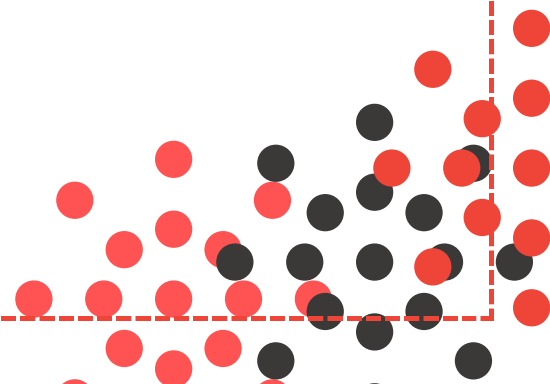
S- Specific

M- Measurable

A- Attainable

R- Realistic

T- Time-based



While determining that you are going to become flexible is a noble goal, you will have more success if you plan that you will be able to touch your toes by stretching every day for ten minutes for two weeks.

If you need help with some ideas, try:

- Focusing on your neck for a week, to see if you can get a complete 180-degree range of motion.
- Achieving the splits by stretching every day for 10 minutes.
- Stretch every day for thirty days.

### Stretches for flexibility.

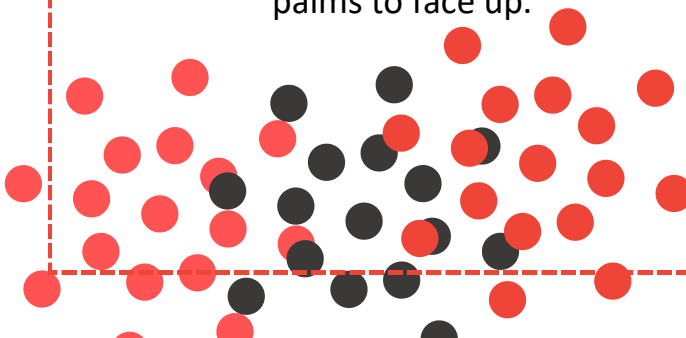
The key to achieving flexibility is by doing a variety of stretches that stretch as many muscles in as many directions as safely possible. These are a small sample of the physio-approved stretches that WeStretch focuses on.

#### Neck

- Tilt your head as if you are smelling your armpit.
- Looking forward, tilt your ear to your shoulder.
- Look up towards the roof.
- Tilt your head to look down at your belly.
- Look over your shoulder to the side.

#### Shoulder

- Circle your arms backward.
- Extend your arms in front of you and rotate your arms so that your palms face outwards.
- Stand up tall and draw your shoulder blades together.
- Extend your arms out in front of your body and cross them.
- Interlace your fingers and extend your arms above your head, turning your palms to face up.





## Back

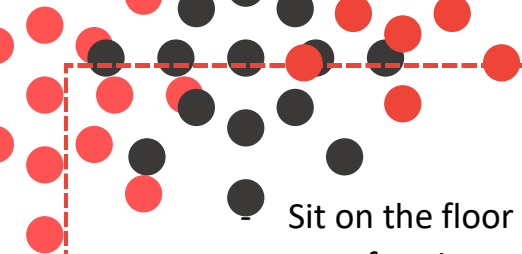
- Sit up straight, with your legs extended together in front of you. Cross your left leg over your right and twist to face left. Repeat on the other side.
- Clasp your hands together behind your back, bend forward, and let your arms fall forward as well.
- Get on your hands and knees, and gently arch your back up towards the ceiling, tucking your chin into your chest. Slowly, transition so that your chest presses towards the floor and your head looks up.
- Lie on your stomach and use your arms to push your chest up and arch your back. Rotate to look over one of your shoulders, then repeat on the opposite side.
- Raise your arms above your head, and on the exhale, tilt your upper body to one side.

## Wrist

- Standing or sitting, circle your wrists.
- Bring your hands behind your back and press together into the prayer position.
- Bring your palms to your shoulders.
- Extend your arms out in front of you, palms face in. Tilt your hands, bringing your thumbs toward you.
- Extend your arms out in front of you and rotate your wrists as far as they can go one way, then switch directions.

## Hips

- Standing tall, slide your leg back and out to the side.
- Get down on all fours and cross one leg underneath your body. Gently lie down on top of your bent leg, extending the opposite leg straight back. The ankle crossed underneath your body should be near your opposite hip.
- Sit on the floor, bringing the bottoms of your feet together. Press down on your knees with your elbows.

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- Sit on the floor with legs straight out in front of you. Cross one leg over so your foot is positioned in between your opposite knee and hip. Twist over the same side as the crossed leg.
  - Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Bring the bottom of your foot to your opposite knee and lean over to touch the toes of your extended leg.
  - While standing, cross one leg in front of the other and lean in the same direction as your back leg.
  - Stand with your legs spread wide apart and arms out to the side. Bend one knee and keep the other straight to do a side lunge.
  - Stand and hold on to something steady as you swing your leg from side to side.

## Ankle

- Balance on one leg and point the toes on your opposite foot.
- Rotate your ankle in so that your toes are pointing towards the opposite leg and your pinky toe is tilted to the floor.
- Step one foot on the wall, so as much of your foot is on the wall as possible and step the opposite leg back.
- Flex your toes up.
- Rotate your feet so that your ankles press together.

## Accountability

### Pick a time and stick with it.

If you're a morning person and like to start your day off on the right foot, add a stretching session into your morning routine.

If you're a night owl who would like some time to decompress before bed, then stretching before you go to sleep might be perfect for you.

Even if you have a busy day, but want a mental and physical reset, doing a stretching routine around lunch is a great use of your break.

Regardless of what time you choose, being consistent with it will lead to the greatest success and flexibility gains.



## Find a friend and challenge them to become flexible with you.

Holding yourself accountable becomes a lot easier when you have someone doing it with you. Whether it is someone who is trying to improve their flexibility, or they just want to keep you company, you are more likely to be successful with their help.

If you're looking for an easier way to keep an eye on each other's progress, send each other stretching challenges through the WeStretch app. This way, you can ensure that you stretch daily while enjoying the competition element of improving your flexibility with a friend.

## Try a thirty-day stretching challenge!

### *Version 1: the free version*

Starting today (because there really is no time like the present!), start stretching for 3 minutes.

Tomorrow, stretch for 4 minutes.

Each additional day, stretch one minute more than the day before. By the end of the 30 days, you will be up to stretching for 33 minutes and you will notice significant gains in your overall flexibility and mobility.

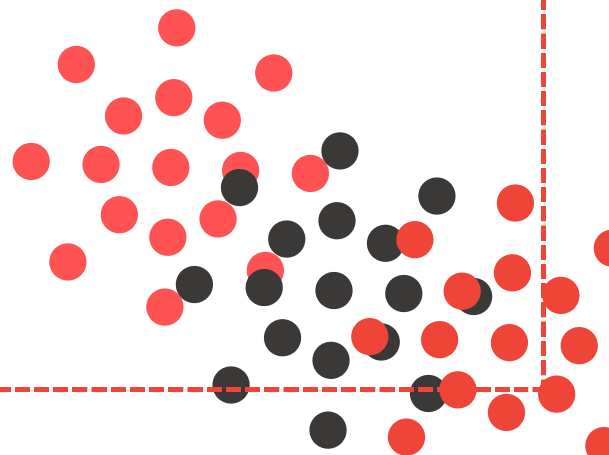
### *Version 2: the variety version*

Every day, stretch for the same length of time. 10 minutes is a great starting place, but you can adjust the time, depending on what works best for you. Try all the different routines, even if it's something you don't think may apply to you, like a manual labour or a pregnancy routine. You might find the best stretches in those routines!

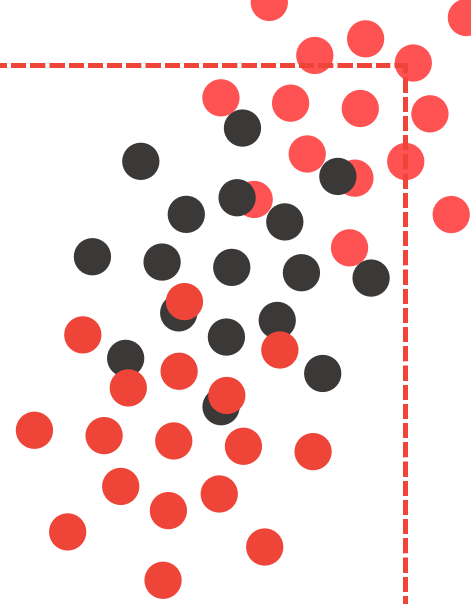
Day 1: The fundamental, basic routine.

Day 2: Desk Jockey, break time routine

Day 3: Beginner strengthening



Day 4: Back pain relief, full spine  
Day 5: Walking activity, warm up  
Day 6: Aerobic, easy  
Day 7: Jogging activity, cool down.  
Day 8: Only floor poses  
Day 9: Manual Labour, quick paced warm up  
Day 10: Intermediate strengthening  
Day 11: Ballet, right & left splits  
Day 12: Neck pain relief, neck & shoulders  
Day 13: Golf, sport improvement  
Day 14: Pregnancy, first & second trimester  
Day 15: Only using the “cat” pose.  
Day 16: Desk Jockey, posture improvement  
Day 17: Aerobic, general  
Day 18: Hip pain relief, both hips  
Day 19: Tap dance activity, middle splits.  
Day 20: Only standing poses.  
Day 21: Swimming activity, warm up  
Day 22: Weightlifting, sport improvement  
Day 23: Choose your five favourite positions and filter everything else out.  
Day 24: Manual Labour, mobility and joint health  
Day 25: Advanced strengthening  
Day 26: Aerobic, Karen’s favourite  
Day 27: Only using the “dead man” pose.



Day 28: Knee pain relief, both knees

Day 29: Table tennis, cool down.

Day 30: Advanced core strengthening

\*BONUS\* Day 31: Only using “T-pose.”

### *Version 3: the splits*

You can find the split routines under any of the dance filters, but you’ll rotate through “right splits”, “left splits”, and “middle splits”. These routines are great for gaining hip flexibility and you may even gain your full splits by the end of it! (Our writer, Kayla, tried this challenge, and by the end of it she had her full right splits and almost full left splits!)

### **Conclusion**

Gaining your flexibility isn’t an insurmountable task, rather it just takes a continuous effort. If you would like to learn more, reach out to us at [support@westretch.ca](mailto:support@westretch.ca). Otherwise, happy stretching!

