Session #647
Effective Flexibility Training:
You Don’t Have to Tie Yourself in Knots!
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Why Stretch?
• Reduce the risk of injury
• Improved sports performance
• Increased ability to perform tasks of daily living
• Reduce muscle imbalances

• Restore good posture
  o Improve the body’s ability to pump fluids effectively
• Improve body awareness

From a holistic perspective, stretching helps:
1. Sensing – Awareness.
2. Learning - Acquiring skill.
4. Adapting - Inner to outer.
5. Developing freedom (flow) of the body~mind through self-awareness so that you can energize your “Dream” or chosen disposition.

Types of Stretching
• Static
• Dynamic
• Neuromuscular mobilization
• Direct Pressure

• Psychomotor Methodology:
  o Developmental
  o Maintenance
  o Pre-event
  o Post-Event

Tonic vs. Phasic Muscles
• Tonic Muscles react to faulty loading by shortening and tightening. They have a tendency to try to do the work for the opposing or synergistic phasic muscles. E.g. the lumbar erector (low back) muscles.
• Phasic Muscles tend to lengthen and weaken in response to the same stress that shortens tonic muscles. E.g. the abdominal muscles.

Mechanics of Stretching
Be warm to avoid over-stretching and injuring a muscle. Wear loose clothing that will insulate your body, retaining the heat generated while stretching.

The CHEK RULE for Stretching
If it’s not tight, don’t stretch it! There are exceptions to the rule, such as sports-specific flexibility development, but in general, this rule should be followed. When we create hypermobility, we disrupt the body’s energy systems.

“If you are not assessing, you are guessing!”
- Paul Chek

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Neck Rotation

Assessment
- Sit upright, maintaining good posture. Keep shoulders & back against chairback.
- Rotate your head to the right and then to the left.

Norm = ____________________________

Stretch
- Sit with good posture and rotate your head to one side.
- Place opposite hand on cheek. Inhale & gently rotate your head into your hand. Look in the direction that you are turning.
- Hold 5 secs, then exhale & look behind you to rotate your head into the stretch.

Levator Scapulae

Assessment – The Sweetheart Test
- First perform the Neck Rotation Test shown above.
- Then place one arm around a partner, making sure to completely relax the muscles in your arm and shoulder.
- Rotate your head away from your relaxed arm.
- Switch arms and repeat the test on the other side

Norm = ____________________________

Stretch
- Stand sideways about 1ft. from a wall.
- Reach up with the arm closest to the wall.
- Look away from the wall, bend this arm & grab the base of your skull.
- Lean toward the wall, allowing the hand holding your skull to transfer the lean into the neck, creating a side-bending action on the neck. BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO BE TOO FORCEFUL!
- Simultaneously inhale and press your elbow into the wall and your head into your hand for 5 secs.
- After 5 secs, exhale & relax toward the wall, allowing your arm to gently side-bend your head and neck away from the wall until you feel a stretch.
- Repeat x 3-5 on each side.

Internal and External Rotators of the Shoulders

Assessment - Apley Scratch Test
This is a two-part test:
- Reach over the shoulder and attempt to touch the top inside corner of the opposite shoulder blade. This is the test for external rotation.
- Reach behind the back and attempt to touch the lower part of the opposite shoulder blade. This tests internal rotation.

Norm = ____________________________
**Stretch**

Restriction in external rotation = medial or internal rotator muscles of the shoulder need stretching:

- Stand in a doorway & place your arm in the same position as if you were about to throw a ball, with forearm & hand in front of the doorjamb.
- Gently rotate your trunk forward around your arm as though your arm were a stationary object.
- Once you have reached a position where you feel a stretch on the medial rotators of the shoulder, take a deep breath & press your hand into wall.
- Hold about 1 lb. of pressure on the wall for 5 secs 5 secs.
- Exhale and rotate the trunk around the arm, increasing the stretch.
- Repeat x 3-5 each side.

You can also perform the Swiss ball Pec. Minor stretch below.

Restriction in internal rotation = lateral or external rotator muscles of the shoulder need stretching:

- Reach behind your back and grab a doorknob or any object sufficiently solid to serve as an anchor point.
- Slowly lower your body to the point at which you feel a stretch behind your shoulder.
- Inhale and gently pull downward on the doorknob for 5 secs.
- Exhale and allow your body to slide down just enough to comfortably increase the stretch.
- Repeat x 3-5 each side.

**Pectoralis Minor and Major**

**Assessment**

- Lie on your back with your hands behind your head.
- Allow your arms to drop toward the floor.

Norm = ________________________________

**Stretch – Pec. Minor (also stretches medial shoulder rotators)**

- Place your hand and arm over the apex of a Swiss ball with your shoulder resting on the ball.
- Allow your body to drop forward while allowing your shoulder blade to move toward your spine.
- Once you feel a stretch, inhale and press your hand and shoulder into the ball for 5 secs.
- Relax and allow your body to drop forward, bringing your shoulder blade closer to your spine.
- The apex of the ball will be progressively higher than the plane of the shoulders.
- Repeat x 3-5 each side.

**Stretch – Pec. Major**

The pectoralis major is stretched in much the same way as the medial shoulder rotators, with the exception being that the emphasis is on taking the arm away from the midline, not so much on moving into lateral rotation. Again, a doorway or a Swiss ball may be used.
Spinal Rotation

*Assessment*
- Lie on your back with your legs in the air, bent at the knees.
- Slowly lower your legs to one side.

*Stretch*
- Lie on your back. The hips should be flexed until the knees point to the ceiling, making sure the lower legs are completely relaxed.
- Place the arm of the side you are going to rotate your lower body toward on your thigh, so it can aid in lowering your legs.
- Stretch the other arm out on the floor for stabilization.

Spinal Side Bending

*Assessment - Side Bend Test*
- Stand with your feet together and your heels, gluts, back and head against a wall. Keeping your back, head and shoulders against the wall, slide your hand down the left leg. Go as far as you can without the right heel coming off the ground.
- Perform the same procedure to the opposite side. Avoid flexion and extension.

*Stretch – Oblique Abdominals*
- Carefully roll down a Swiss ball onto your side.
- You may use a wall to anchor your feet.
- Grasp the wrist of your top hand.
- Gently roll the upper body forward & backward while slightly tugging the upper arm downward. When your feel a tight area, inhale and gently attempt to side bend back up, pulling against your lower arm. You don't need to actually move, just activate the muscles.
- Relax into a new stretch position as you exhale.

Hip Flexors

*Assessment - Thomas Test*
- Find a strong table or firm bed to lie on.
- Place your body so that you are lying on your back with your legs hanging off the end of the bed or table. Make sure your knee and lower leg can hang freely without any obstructions. Place one hand under your lower back, opposite your belly button.
- Using the other hand, bring the knee to your chest. Pull your leg back until you feel your spine begin to press down on the hand under your back.
- At this point, look to see if the other leg has lifted off the table or bed.
- Check also if the lower leg is hanging straight down toward the floor.

Norm = _________________________________
If the thigh of the leg opposite to the one you have pulled toward your chest has come off the table you need to perform the Lunge Stretch.
If the lower leg does not hang straight down, you need to perform the Quadriceps Stretch.

**Lunge Stretch**
- Assume a lunge position, making sure your front foot stays in front of the knee.
- Draw your belly button in toward your spine and tuck your tail under (this will flatten your low back).
- Move the whole pelvis forward, keeping it square to the front.
- To increase the stretch, reach the arm on the trailing leg side over your head and bend your trunk to the side. Rotating your pelvis toward the front leg will also increase the stretch.

**Supine Quadriceps Stretch**
- From a kneeling position, drop back onto your hands. You may need a mat to perform this stretch to avoid discomfort in the knees.
- Draw the navel inward and roll the pelvis under.
- Project the hips forward as though you were trying to touch the ceiling with your belt buckle.
- Once you have a comfortable stretch, hold for 20 secs.
- Repeat x 3-5 or until you no longer feel you are making progress.

**Upper Hamstrings**

**Assessment - Waiter's Bow Test**
Assesses length of upper hamstrings & the ability to allow normal motion at the hips.
- Stand up straight with good posture and take a pinch of skin at the low back directly opposite your belly button.
- Hold the other arm out like a waiter serving wine and bend forward with the knees locked straight.

Norm = ____________________________

**Stretch**
The Waiter's Bow Test is also used as the corrective stretch:
- To help maintain the correct position, place strips of athletic tape either side of the lumbar spine.
- Hold for 20 seconds.
Lower Hamstrings

Assessment - Supine Knee Extension Test
Assesses lower hamstring length.
- Lie on your back with both legs extended on the floor.
- Place a blood pressure cuff under your lumbar spine at the belly button level.
- Lift one leg, bent at the knee, until your thigh is at 90° to the floor.
- Inflate the blood pressure cuff to 70 mmHg. Holding the thigh vertical, slowly extend the knee. Be sure not to lift your head off the floor during the test. Stop as soon as the pressure begins to increase on the gauge.

Norm = ____________________________

Stretch
The assessment is the stretch and is useful for people who sit at work.
- Perform the stretch with a towel rolled up under the lumbar spine at the belt-line level. The towel should be the width and thickness of the fattest part of your hand.
- Grab one thigh just below the knee and bring the thigh is perpendicular to the floor.
- Pull your toes back toward your shin as far as you can and then slowly straighten your leg without letting the thigh move in your hands.
- When you reach the point of a comfortable stretch, hold for 20 secs, then switch sides. Alternate between left and right sides x 3.

Hip Rotators

Stretch - 90/90 Hip Stretch (the stretch is also the assessment)
- Sit on the floor with both your front and back legs bent to 90° and a 90° angle at the groin created by both legs.
- Place the hand on the same side as the forward leg on the ground next to your hip, inside of the arm facing forward.
- Tip your pelvis forward and increase lumbar curvature. Hold this position as you inhale and bend forward from the hip, putting pressure into the hand by the hip.
- Allow yourself to bend only from the hip, keep the chest up, shoulders parallel to the floor, and the eyes level with the horizon.
- When you feel a comfortable stretch, hold the position and press the front knee and ankle firmly into the ground for 5 secs.
- Relax, exhale and move further into the stretch. Repeat x 3-5.
- Next, move your torso so that your head lines up with the middle shin and repeat the process. As you become more flexible, you can attempt to perform the stretch with the head aligned with the front foot.
- Repeat on the other leg.

Taping the Lumbar Spine: This modification is very important for anyone with a history of back pain because it prevents over-stretching the low back during what is intended to be a hip stretch.

REFERENCES
1. Chek, P. How to Eat, Move and Be Healthy!, C.H.E.K Institute, 2004.

For a complete list of resources and courses, please contact the C.H.E.K Institute

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