



Functional Flexibility

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In order for the body to work efficiently, each joint must be able to move through the full range of motion. This means that the surrounding musculature must also be at the optimal length. Picture the body as a long chain with individual links connected together. The links represent individual muscles within the body (chain). When a single link is not functioning properly (kink in the chain) or shortened, it affects the entire chain. This is the same principle with the body. If a particular muscle group is tight and not functioning properly it will affect another part of the chain or the entire chain. It is important to identify the shortened muscle group and restore it to the proper length.

A tight muscle group may inhibit any exercise in the weight room. The goal with flexibility training is to improve length tension relationships. A muscle that is not functioning properly because it is unable to go through the full range of motion can have a negative affect on an opposing muscle group. For example, tight hip flexors can inhibit the function of its antagonist (in this case the glutes). This will inhibit hip extension affecting the amount of weight you will be able to lift during squats, deadlifts, and all Olympic lift variations - just to name a

few exercises. To fix this problem first foam roll the hip flexors, then stretch to lengthen these muscles. This will help enhance hip extension.

The body moves in three planes of motion, therefore you need to stretch in all planes of motion. This includes stretching in the sagittal plane, which most of us already do. An example of this is reaching straight for your toes to stretch out your hamstrings. Secondly, stretch in the frontal plane, which includes lateral or side-to-side movements. You can stretch your hip flexors in the frontal plane by having one knee on the ground and the opposite foot out in front, drive the hips forward and reach overhead right to left. The finally plane of motion is the transverse plane. A great example of transverse plane stretching is trunk rotations.

Warm up – Dynamic Stretching

Before a workout, either strength training or cardio session, the best type of stretching to perform is dynamic. This does not refer to images of women in unitards bouncing up and down reaching for their toes to stretch out their hamstrings. Instead, this refers to the concept of moving the muscles and joints through their full range of motion with movement. If your goal is to get prepared for a workout then you should activate and lengthen the muscles. This would include hip drivers for the hip flexors, torso rotations for the middle and upper back, and 3-way hamstring reaches. Focus your dynamic warm up on all major muscle groups or specifically areas of tightness or dysfunction. Remember; continually move through the full range of motion without holding the stretch for longer than a few seconds.

Recovery – Static Stretching

After a hard work out your goal should be recovery. The more you can recover from a hard work out, the harder you can hit your next work out. A great way to reduce muscle soreness, increase lactic acid removal, and restore proper length to a muscle after a work out is through static stretching. Static stretching refers to lengthening a muscle and holding it in this position for a particular period of time (usually 10-30 seconds is recommended). During static stretching, I would still encourage you to stretch the muscle in different planes of motion. For example, this time hold the three way hamstring stretch for 20 seconds in each position before moving on to the next angle.

Try to make flexibility training a regular part of your workout to improve muscle function, aid in recovery from intense workouts, and maintain efficient movement patterns.