



HEALTH TIPS FOR PERFORMING ARTISTS SHEET 1: IF YOU DON'T BEND, YOU BREAK

SAFE STRETCHING:

Why stretch?

Many performers are aware of the benefits of regular stretching. Stretching your body can help by:

- Preparing muscles and tendons for the rigors of performance and rehearsal
- Increasing flexibility in tight muscles which are habitually held in a shortened position during practice and performance
- Improving body awareness (proprioception)

When to stretch?

The best time to stretch is when your body is warmed up and the tissues are more elastic. So this could be : –

- As part of your warm up
- During rest breaks when rehearsing or performing
- After performing

NB: Research has shown that stretching can actually reduce muscular strength and performance! Because of this it is generally advised to allow 15 minutes between stretching and performance.

How to stretch?

Most importantly, stretching should **never** cause or aggravate pain or discomfort. Remember to breathe deeply and relax during your routine.



There are three main types of stretching:

Ballistic – vigorous, high speed stretching (e.g. high kicks). These can be dangerous and are advisable only if your performance involves leaping/ jumping

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF) – this involves taking the muscle into a stretched position and then gently tightening it for a few seconds before stretching further into the movement as it relaxes

Static stretching – this involves taking the muscle into its longest position and holding the part still for a period of time.

How many/How long?

Research has shown that the optimal number and length of time for stretching to produce muscle lengthening is three static stretches of 15 - 30 seconds for each muscle being targeted. 10-15 minutes per day total stretching time is a good general guideline.

Which stretches?

Generally you should stretch muscles that are being heavily used during your practice /performance or that are often held in a shortened position. This will differ for each performer; for example, string instrumentalists often need to stretch the muscles on the left side of the neck that are held in a short position during playing. If you are not sure which stretches are the ones for you, check with your health care provider or look below for more information.

Stretching – there are infinite numbers of stretches you can do.

The following are a few to try!





Where to find more information

Australian Institute of Sport

www.ausport.gov.au/site_tools/site_search?query=stretching&collection=ASC&form=simpleFragment

www.ausport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/115607/11_SMA_Warm_Up_information.pdf

References

Cochrane Summaries <http://summaries.cochrane.org/>

Taylor, K (2008). The negative effects of static stretching restored when combined with a sports specific warm up component. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* 4(4)