

What is Flexibility and Range of Motion Training?

Flexibility is measured by the amount of movement around a joint in the body. Muscles that are too tight can restrict the degree of movement in your limbs. This restricted movement limits your range of motion. For example, tight muscles in the front of the shoulder can limit how far you can reach above your head. In this case, your ability to perform some activities of daily living, such as reaching for a dish in a high cupboard, may be negatively affected. Good flexibility and range of motion are required to not only live an active life, but to perform all of your daily activities, including walking, driving, cooking - even sitting and standing.

What Can Flexibility and Range of Motion Training Do For Me?

- **Improve Posture**

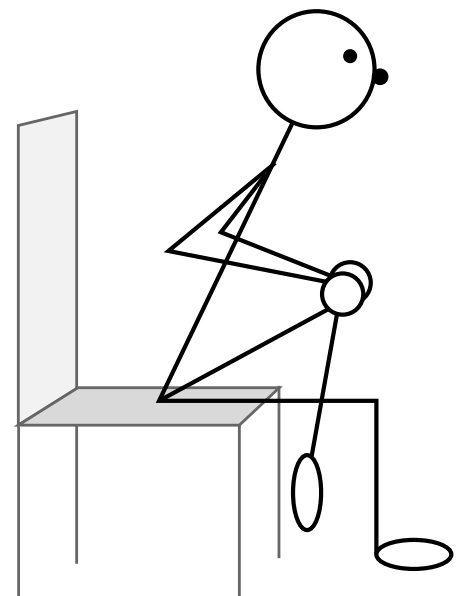
Healthy muscles and ligaments are they key to good posture. Our bones are connected by ligaments, tendons and muscles. When the muscles are too tight, or even too loose from lack of use (see Strength Training Handout), your joints can become unstable. Tight muscles pull the bones out of their intended positions. One example of this is the rounded shoulder posture that we often see in older adults. This is caused by years of forward motion, tight chest muscles and weak middle and lower back muscles. A program that includes flexibility exercises for the chest and strengthening exercises for the back can greatly improve this posture.

- **Reduce Back Pain, Joint Problems and Breathing Problems**

Healthy joints are surrounded by healthy muscles, tendons and ligaments. Since muscles are the most responsive to flexibility exercise, a muscle stretching program can loosen tight low-back muscles to relieve back pain. Sore wrists, knees and shoulders all benefit from gentle stretching by helping the joint return to its normal position. And finally, stretches that open up the rib cage and pull the shoulder back can help improve breathing by allowing more space for the lungs.

- **Improve or Maintain Independence**

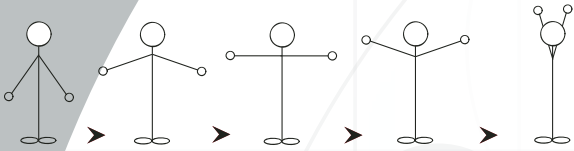
Range of motion, the distance a limb can move around a joint, affects your ability to move easily. Whether it's turning your head while backing your car into the driveway, reaching into a high cupboard, tying your shoes or picking something up off the floor in your home, flexibility and range of motion play a vital role in maintaining your independence.



What Types of Flexibility and Range of Motion Exercises Should I Do?

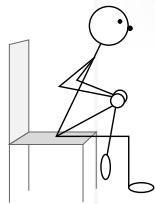
Here are six simple stretches that you can do at home.

- Perform each of these stretches one or two times each day.
- Hold each position for 20-30 seconds.
- Breathe throughout the stretch.



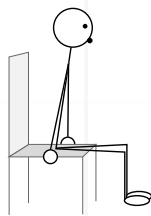
Sunflower Stretch

- Pull arms back as far as possible, shoulders down, palms forward.
- Start at the waist and raise arms higher as you pull back with each repetition until arms are overhead.



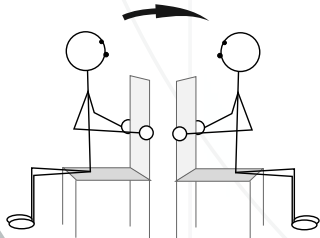
Seated Gluteus

- Sit up straight in chair.
- Cross ankle over knee.
- Lean forward from hip.
- Gently push crossed knee downward.
- Repeat on other side.



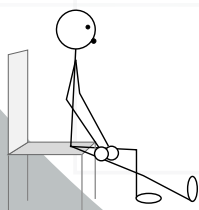
Trapezius Stretch

- Sit straight in chair.
- Grasp chair bottom on either side.
- Pull up on chair bottom while pulling shoulders down.
- Drop chin gently toward chest.



Spinal Rotation in Chair

- Sit on front edge of a sturdy chair.
- Keep back straight and hips facing forward.
- Rotate right and grasp chair arm with both hands – gently pull.
- Repeat on other side.



Hamstring Stretch

- Sit on front edge of a sturdy chair.
- Straighten right leg in front of you, heel on floor.
- Lean forward from hip and lift tailbone up toward ceiling.
- Repeat on other side.