

Getting The Most From Your Fitness First Stretchout Strap

Safety

Caution: Please read and understand all the instructions for using the Fitness First Stretchout Strap before you begin its use. Perform all movements slowly and with control, especially in the beginning. If you experience pain beyond what you would normally expect during a stretching exercise, stop immediately and seek medical attention.

Flexibility Training Defined

Stretching is usually performed to obtain increased flexibility in order to improve ones range of motion. In fact, stretching or flexibility training is more appropriately named Range of Motion Training. The desire to be 'loose' or 'limber' drives many people to stretch beyond what they are capable of inducing pain, trauma, and stress upon their muscles, joints, and nervous system only to have the same muscle group tighten back up ten minutes later. This is also fuelled by the media and various schools of 'stretching' who promote and promise long, toned, and lengthy muscles which is not possible physiologically nor mechanically.

What most people do not consider, however, is why are they stretching it in the first place?

Flexibility can be good or bad. Excess flexibility, or increased range of motion without control or strength in a position can equal injury. Too little flexibility, or 'being tight', may inhibit desired ranges of motion, change posture, stress the nervous system and cause pain on a continual basis. Having good range of motion is desirable, but remember that you are only as strong as the range you can control.

Flexibility Training is a delicate balance between wanting a good and effective range of motion and being able to maintain it with strength throughout the entire range. Joints have established ranges of motion and violation of that range is something to consider. Remember: what is your goal? Are you a competitive gymnast, or just an avid exerciser? The important factor to consider when incorporating flexibility training into your exercise routine is how much is too much?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I forcing myself in to positions that are painful?
- How long are the results of my stretching session lasting?
- Do I really need to be able to get my body to that position in the first place?

If your range of motion is indeed limited and being inhibited by tight muscles, consider not only stretching the tight muscle, but also strengthening the antagonist, or the muscle opposite the joint motion your are inhibited in. For instance, tight hamstrings may be a result of weak hip flexors. Having tight hip flexors and lower back may indicate a need to strengthen the hamstrings, gluteals and abdominals. Then, start to think globally.

A 'tight' muscle is just an indication that something is wrong either in your activities of daily living, posture, exercises you perform, or injury. You may want to seek the guidance of a qualified technician to analyze your posture, gait, and other movements.



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Stretch Out introduction

The Stretch Out is a flexibility aid designed to act as an assistant in placing you in positions of elongation and also as an anchor to apply resistance against. Before beginning any stretching at all, always warm-up with some type of cardiovascular exercise to increase blood flow to the extremities and elevate muscle temperature. Stretching cold muscles can potentially cause tearing of muscles and even connective tissue setting you back weeks, defeating the purpose of stretching in the first place. Remember to perform movements with control focusing on the muscle group(s) you are working. Do not pull with a vengeance into positions you are not able to accomplish. Just as Rome was not built in a day, nor is perfect joint range of motion, especially if you are beginning from extreme positions of inflexibility and postural maladies. Take your time, be patient, and dedicate yourself to developing a well-rounded exercise program. I would also recommend learning some basic Anatomy to figure out exactly which muscles you are working. The exercises that follow are designed to not only improve range of motion, but also strengthen the positions you obtain. Practice not only using the Stretch Out Strap to get you into the position, but also obtain the position of your own volition. Once there, applying a steady force in the opposite direction trains the nervous system to accept the newfound range and maintain it with issue integrity and strength. **Caution:** 'Position' means to place the limb or trunk in a lengthened, or position of **slight tension** observing **mild** discomfort. **Never** force the body to positions of pain. The body has protective mechanisms for a reason, do not violate them!



Straight Leg—Start



Straight Leg—Start



Option C

Hip Extensors: Hamstrings & Glutes

Straight leg stretches may be performed from a position of internal leg rotation, (toes turned inward), and also from a position of external rotation, (toes turned outward), to stimulate or emphasize both the medial and lateral groups respectively. The most effective way to improve range of motion in the hamstrings is with a straight leg and knee remaining locked throughout. Hook the SOS end loop mid-foot and actively, under your own strength using the hip flexors, elevate your leg to a position of slight discomfort, before pain and burning. Hold in place with SOS for 15-30 seconds, relax, repeat.

Option A: Bring leg to desired position, after hold, push leg down in opposite direction, (hip extension), while resisting with the SOS for six seconds. Rest, and actively pull leg back further, (without using SOS), then repeat.

Option B: Use SOS to assist getting into starting position, for resistance, and to move further in to the range after isometric contraction.

Option C: Hook the SOS toward the front of the foot to incorporate muscles of the calf. When in position, pull the toes toward the shin, (dorsiflex), with, or without aid from the SOS.



Two Legs Straight—Start



Two Legs Straight—Finish



Seated Ham—Start



Seated Ham—Finish

Two Legs Straight

Hook middle of SOS around both midfeet, contract abdominals to support lower back, gently elevate both legs into position. Once stable, slowly flex knees, pause, then slowly straighten.

Option A: From the flexed knee position, flex hips slightly further, (toward chest), then attempt to straighten while maintaining hip position.

Option B: (seated) hook two middle loops around top of feet. Hold third set of loops in hands. Sit with neutral spine, (good posture), legs straight, and pull slightly on SOS. Hold 15-30 seconds, relax. Flex torso at hips, maintaining neutral spine, and repeat.



Inner Leg (adductors)

Hook SOS around foot and lie on your back. Pull strap outward, parallel to floor. Try to keep pelvis from bending laterally.



Adductors

Inner Leg (abductors)

Hook SOS around foot and lie on your back and cross uninjured leg over other. Pull strap inward, parallel to floor. Try to keep pelvis from bending laterally.



Sidelying Neutral

Sidelying (adductors, medial hamstrings)

Hook SOS around foot and lie on your back and cross uninvolved leg over other. Pull strap inward, parallel to floor. Try to keep pelvis from bending laterally. **Option A:** Neutral Hip. **Option B:** Externally Rotated. **Note:** The reason for performing the inner and outer thigh stretches from a lying rather than seated position is that a flexed hip, (90°), changes muscle involvement. Abductors active in the straight, [anatomical neutral], position are not the same ones active in a flexed hip position.



Sidelying Externally Rotated



**Flexed Knee
Flexed Knee**

Some hamstring will still be involved, but more emphasis is now placed on the glutes (gluteus Maximus) **How:** Loop SOS midfoot, flex knee, and pull with SOS.



Flexed Knee/Hip w/Ext. Rot.

Flexed Knee/Hip w/External Rotation

This stretch still emphasizes the glute max, but brings in the piriformis which changes its role as an external rotator when the hip progresses toward 90° of hip flexion. Dysfunction the piriformis has been associated with many lower extremity conditions including Sciatica. **How:** With a flexed knee, hook SOS midfoot and pull toward opposite shoulder.



Flexed Knee/Hip w/Int. Rot.

Flexed Knee/Hip w/Internal Rotation

This stretch still lengthen the external rotators of the hip, (minus the piriformis), the quadratus femoris, gemili and obturators. **How:** with a flexed knee, hook SOS midfoot and pull the outward as if attempting to bring involved leg heel to the same side shoulder.



Option A

Flexed Knee/Hip w/Internal Rotation

Option A: Practice from various degrees of hip flexion.



Lower Back Pic 1



Lower Back Pic 2

Lower Back

Hook SOS behind knees and gently/slowly pull toward chest focusing on each spinal segment being elevated from floor. Repeat ten to twenty times (picture 1).

Loop one end of SOS through opposite end loop. Place around both feet. Holding end, pull legs outward at a 45° angle keeping both hips flat on floor (picture 2).



**Shoulder—Start
(Opt. A)**



**Shoulder—Finish
(Opt. A)**



**Pec/Shoulder—Start
(Opt B)**



**Pec/Shoulder—Finish
(Opt B)**

Shoulder Complex

Option A: Latissimus, Posterior Rhomboids, Deltoids, Levator Scapulae, Middle/Lower Trapezius, and Tricep Long Head. Face away with SOS parallel to door with straight arm. Start from position of comfort and slowly "incrementally" walk forward with arm moving further into flexion/overhead, keeping arm in line with body (not out to side).

Option B Horizontal Abduction: Pectorals and Shoulders: Face parallel to door with arm out to side, rotate away from strap and door keeping abdominals contracted, while maintaining neutral spinal posture.



**Hor. Add—Start
(Opt. C)**



**Hor. Add—Finish
(Opt. C)**

Shoulder Complex—Horizontal Adduction

Posterior/Mid Deltoid, Rhomboids, Mid-Trapezius. Face parallel to door w/arm to side, rotate away from strap and door keeping abdominals contracted, while maintaining neutral spinal posture



**Shoulder Ext.—Start
(Opt. D)**



**Shoulder Ext.—Finish
(Opt. D)**

Shoulder Complex—Extension

Pectorals, Biceps, and Shoulders. Face away from door, arm at side, palm facing forward. Slowly and "incrementally" walk away from door, having arm extend away from body. Do not do into excessive range.



**Adduction—Start
(Opt. E)**



**Adduction—Finish
(Opt. E)**

Adduction

Posterior/Mid Deltoid, Rhomboids, Mid-Trapezius. Face parallel to door with arm in front of body, holding SOS with arm furthest away. Slowly walk away, sideways while keeping arm straight, having arm move across body.



**Ext. Adduction—Start
(Opt. F)**



**Adduction—Finish
(Opt. F)**

Shoulder Complex— Ext. Adduction

Posterior Rotator Cuff/Shoulder. Face parallel to door with arm beside body and having SOS coming from behind. Slowly walk away, sideways while keeping arm straight, having arm move behind and across body.



**Flexion
(Opt. G)**

Flexion

Latissimus, Pectorals, Teres Major. Attach SOS high, place one hand in end loop, bend over flexing shoulder with arm remaining straight and close to torso up to comfortable range. The goal is to obtain 180°, where the arm is in line with the torso.