

# Stretch Smart: Building Healthy Habits for Summer Adventures

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Summer is the perfect time to embrace outdoor activities—whether it's hiking, swimming, cycling, or simply spending more time in the sun. However, diving into an active season without proper preparation can lead to stiffness, soreness, or even injury. That's where stretching comes in! Establishing a simple, consistent stretching routine can enhance flexibility, reduce muscle strain, and keep you moving comfortably all summer long. Believe it or not, patients often come in for suggestions on “age-appropriate” stretching and exercise, as well as a stepwise approach to developing an in-home program. If you're uncertain about whether a stretching program is right for you, just read on for more information.

**Why Stretching Matters:** Stretching isn't just about limbering up—it improves circulation, boosts range of motion, and even helps relieve stress. When we stretch deeply, we develop a breathing pattern that enhances oxygen delivery to our brain and muscles, providing a better sense of well-being. As adults engage in various summer activities, flexibility plays a key role in maintaining comfort and preventing injuries. A few minutes of daily stretching can make a significant difference in mobility and recovery.

**How to Start a Stretching Routine:** Developing a stretching habit doesn't have to be complicated. Don't overthink it. That's when people feel they don't have the time and ultimately walk away. Establishing a regular routine can be straightforward, and once it's in place, there's no reason you can't make it a daily ritual. Here are a few steps to ensure success:

1. **Start in a Safe Environment** - Stretching when other people are home or with a friend is a wise choice. This way, if you happen to sprain or over strain yourself, there is someone to assist you. Consider where you would like to start your stretching routine. Select a space that is pleasant and where the surroundings help you feel at ease. Avoid your work room, office, or laundry area. Choose an area that is free of clutter, without loose throw rugs, slippery flooring, or anything that could make the floor less stable, like flimsy mats. Any surface you exercise on should be very sturdy and shock-absorbing.



*Daily stretching boosts flexibility  
and well-being.*

2. **Warm Up First** – Before stretching, engage in light movement like walking or doing arm circles to boost blood flow. Deep breathing: while inhaling deeply, raise your arms in front of you

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## Stretch Smart

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and continue until they are over your head. As you exhale, allow your arms to slowly move back to your sides. Repeat this by counting out loud in thousands for a five-count while you inhale and another five-count while you exhale: Begin inhaling with One 1,000, Two 1,000, Three 1,000, Four 1,000, Five 1,000. Then repeat for exhaling. Complete this deep breathing exercise for five sets of inhaling and exhaling, and you will start to feel the mental clarity that comes from increased oxygen in your brain.

3. **Focus on Key Muscle Groups** – Stretch the areas most used in summer activities: hamstrings, quadriceps, lower back, shoulders, and calves. This includes the largest muscle groups of the lower extremity: the thigh and calf muscles. The heart serves as the muscular pump for the upper body, including the torso, arms, and chest. For the rest of the body, the thighs and calves act as the muscular pumps for the lower extremities. Without these muscular pumps, blood does not circulate through the body. Without blood delivery, oxygen and other nutrients cannot reach our vital organs, such as the brain, heart, lungs,

liver, kidneys, etc. Improving oxygen delivery will enhance your well-being, making your body better equipped for the activities you desire.

4. **Use Proper Technique** – Hold each stretch for about 20–30 seconds, breathing steadily, and avoid bouncing.
5. **Stay Consistent** – Stretch daily, even if it's just 5–10 minutes. Small habits lead to lasting results.
6. **Listen to Your Body** – Stretching should feel good, not painful. If something feels too intense, ease into it.

**Sample Stretching Routine:** Choose stretches that you can manage without feeling unsteady. Stability while standing and stretching is crucial to avoiding falls and other injuries. At age 60, you cannot expect to stretch like 20-year-olds, so keep your expectations realistic. There are numerous stretching exercises designed for different age groups.

### Making Stretching a Habit

Incorporate stretching into your daily routines—after waking up, before exercising, or even while watching TV. Combining stretching with enjoyable activities makes it easier to maintain long term.

*Dr. Molly Schnirring Judge, DPM, FACFAS enjoys consultations with patients of all ages. Family consultations and instructions for in-home care can be provided. Contact the office staff by calling 419-732-2618 and let them know that you have read this article and are ready for a consultation.*

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