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How Stretching Can Explode Your Muscle Growth

By Nick Nilsson

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When you think about gaining muscle, stretching is probably not the first thing that pops into your head. But did you know that stretching plays a critical role in building muscle?

Every muscle in your body is enclosed in a bag of tough connective tissue known as fascia. Fascia is important for holding your muscles in their proper place in your body.

But your fascia may also be holding back your muscle growth. Think for a moment about your muscles. You train them and feed them properly. They want to grow and will grow but something is holding them back. They have no room to grow!

Because fascia is so tough, it doesn't allow the muscle room to expand. It is like stuffing a large pillow into a small pillowcase. The size of the muscle won't change regardless of how hard you train or how well you eat because the connective tissue around your muscles is constricting the muscles within.

The best example of this is the calf muscle. The lower leg is riddled with fascia because of its tremendous weight-bearing duties in the body. It is because of this fascia that many trainers have great difficulty developing their calves.

The solution: stretching.

Using the pillowcase example from above, imagine you can expand the size of the pillowcase by stretching it. Suddenly, the pillow within has more room and will expand to fill that new space.

By stretching your muscles under specific conditions, you can actually stretch your fascia and give your muscles more room to grow.

How Stretching Can Explode Your Muscle Growth

The key to effective fascial stretching is the pump. The best time to stretch to expand the bags that are holding in your muscles is when your muscles are pumped up full of blood.

When your muscles are fully pumped up, they are pressing against the fascia. By stretching hard at that time, you increase that pressure on the fascia greatly, which can lead to expansion of the fascia.

One of the major reasons Arnold Schwarzenegger had such incredible chest development was that he finished his chest workouts with dumbbell flyes, an exercise that emphasizes the stretched position of the pectoral muscles. He would pump his chest up full of blood during the workout then do flyes, holding the stretch at the bottom of the flye. This gave his chest room to grow to amazing proportions.

Fascial stretching is more rigorous than regular stretching but the results can be amazing. When you stretch hard enough to cause the fascia to expand, you will really feel it! When you are stretching the fascia, you should feel a powerful pulling sensation and pressure as the muscle works against the fascia to expand it.

Be sure you do not stretch so hard that you cause the muscle to tear or cause injury to yourself. You will rapidly learn to distinguish the difference between a good stretch and a bad stretch. You should not feel any sharp pain, just a steady pull.

Hold each stretch for at least 20 to 30 seconds as you must give your fascia time to be affected by the stretch. Stretch hard like this only when you have a fully pumped muscle as you must give your fascia a reason to expand. If your muscles aren't pumped, just stretch normally.

You can find instructions for stretching at:

One set of hard stretching after each set you do for a muscle group, besides the obvious benefits of increased flexibility, can have an incredible effect on the size of your muscles and their further ability to grow.

Nick Nilsson is Vice President of BetterU, Inc., an online exercise, fitness, and personal training company. Check out his latest eBook "The Best Exercises You've Never Heard Of" at

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. You can contact him at

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Fitness, Stretching & Exercise Selection For Women

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In addition to stretching the muscles involved in cardiovascular exercise, you need to stretch each specific muscle you train in a fitness program.

When you stretch your muscles it helps to provide better physical performance, prevents injuries, and can help to improve your posture.

When muscles are stretched, the elasticity in them improves which will help to increase your range of motion and improve the quality of your movements.

Never stretch a cold muscle; meaning you should always make sure your muscles are warm before stretching. It's usually better to do a more extensive stretch at the very end of your fitness program, but light stretching between exercises is fine.

Stretching doesn't take a long time, and it shouldn't, but you do benefit tremendously from it.

Stretch only after the muscle has been properly warmed-up. Again, the best time for a complete stretch is when your exercise session has been completed.

By the time you have finished your specific weight lifting program, which will be about 35 – 45 minutes in length, your muscles will have warmed up as much as they can possibly get.

Remember any womens fitness program must always include a warm-up and proper stretching for maximum effectiveness and to prevent injury.

When you do this you will indeed experience the terrific benefits a good weight training program will give you.

Exercise Selection:

How Stretching Can Explode Your Muscle Growth

For you to succeed in your over-all womens fitness plan you need to select at least one exercise for each major muscle group in your body. This will help to promote well-balanced muscle development.

Another important part of your over-all fitness plan is the order your exercises are performed. When doing a range of weightlifting exercises, it's better to start with the larger muscle groups then perform exercises for the smaller muscle groups.

Performing your fitness program in this manner will allow you to be exercising at your best during the most demanding exercises when fatigue levels are the lowest and you feel fresh.

Another important area of exercise selection is the total number of sets per exercise and total number of sets per exercise session.

A "set" as it relates to womens fitness is the number of successive repetitions of a single exercise performed in succession without stopping.

Now the number of sets per exercise and per exercise session is really going to depend on exactly what your goals are.

Always treat your very first set for each muscle group as a warm-up, as was discussed in the warm-up section above.

Then the rest of your sets will be determined by whether or not you are using a beginner, intermediate, or advanced level womens fitness program and what your particular goals are.

To find out more about how to determine sets, exercises, etc. you can visit:

<http://www.womens-health-fitness.com/womens-fitness.html>

Regardless of the number of sets performed, all sets and repetitions have to be done with proper exercise form and under complete control.

Exercise Form Or Technique:

How Stretching Can Explode Your Muscle Growth

One thing that always seems to be missing in most women's fitness programs, and the most common and critical training mistake is exercise form or "technique."

Too much weight usually results in poor form, which decreases your ability to get results and also increases the risk of injury.

Examples of poor form or technique include, but aren't limited to...

- Bouncing the bar off your chest when performing a chest press;
- Using your hips for momentum and over extending your back to initiate the bicep curls;
- Arching your back or bending backwards when performing a shoulder press during the resistance portion of your fitness session;
- Using momentum in any exercise;
- And training at a fast tempo.

Be aware of these types of mistakes and remove them.

Phil Beckett is one of the world's most experienced weightloss, health, fitness and nutrition experts. He is the C.E.O. of Physique Concepts Inc. He's helped thousands of women succeed with their weight loss, health & fitness goals over the past 14 years. Phil also specializes in the research end of women's weight loss products.

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