



HEALTH

The Daily Stretch for Divers

By Gretchen M. Ashton Apr 21, 2016

Good flexibility is important for everyone, not just divers. But for us, it translates into freedom of movement and increased comfort underwater.

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A daily stretch for divers contributes to good flexibility, which is important not only for diving, but for everyday activity. Flexibility translates into to freedom of movement, helps prevent injury, and improves a diver's performance and comfort above and below the surface. Flexibility throughout the body involves the muscles, joints and nerves, and is accomplished through stretching and exercise.

Stretching every day is one of the key fitness components when it comes to diving preparation. Not only that, a minimum amount of flexibility is necessary to gain strength. For example, tight hamstring muscles (on the back of the thigh) make it harder to strengthen the quadriceps muscles (on the front of the thigh), which work to extend the knee joint and straighten the leg. Stretching is not a warm-up. Waiting to stretch until just before a dive will make little difference in the moment, and can be detrimental, especially if the diver doesn't warm up properly and practice a consistent routine of exercise and stretching on non-diving days. The best warm up comes in the form of aerobic movements, involving the body's large muscles, which warm the muscles and lubricate the joints. A short (10-minute) walk on flat terrain or marching in place for a few minutes may be just enough to get the blood flowing and prepare the body for safe diving activities.

The Daily Stretch for Divers

When it comes to stretching, it's best to perform your routine on non-diving days and after exercise, and remember to wait 24 hours after diving. Several studies indicate that stretching before certain exercises can cause injury and reduce performance, but stretching after exercise may help reduce muscle soreness from an intense workout. In either case, be sure to warm up as stated above before performing either cardio or strength exercises, including yoga.

The most common type of solo stretching is called "static stretching," which is safer than other forms of stretching because it occurs slowly and gradually. Once in position, hold the stretch from 10 to 30 seconds with a sensation of pliability — never pull or push through pain. Inhale and exhale deeply while stretching and relax further with each exhale. Perform each stretch twice. Studies show that additional repetitions don't seem to greatly enhance flexibility as much as frequency, so stretch every day and develop flexibility gradually as part of a fitness program. It may take weeks or months for improvement.

Whether stretching alone or participating in group stretching classes, survey your movements to make sure each muscle is stretched. Perform all exercises on both sides of the body. Stretching may be limited by muscle elasticity, muscle size, tight skin, excessive body fat, joint capsules, ligaments and tendons, and bone changes due to arthritis. Avoid positions where the lower back is vulnerable and use pillows or pads for support and comfort. Straps and towels may be used to extend reach and to make it easier to place the body in certain positions. For example, if divers are not yet able to reach their toes during a hamstring stretch, a strap can be wrapped around the foot to aid in a deeper stretch. During a hamstring stretch, it is important to concentrate on contracting the quadriceps muscles to extend the knee joint and straighten the leg. Remember, adding a strap is meant to assist the stretch, not take place of proper form. Finally, whether in a class or at home, it's helpful to stretch in front of a mirror to check your body alignment.



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Gretchen brings her passion for diving and fitness together as the founder of ScubaFit® the only fitness for diving certification which is also approved by both diving and fitness agencies. She is an advanced diver, NBFEE and ISSA Elite Personal Trainer, Specialist in Fitness Therapy and Nutrition, an AAU World Champion Hall-of-Fame athlete, and a mentor for Water Women, Inc. She shares her message with divers by visiting dive clubs, presenting at scuba shows, as a radio guest, as the publisher of FitDiver® Magazine, and with FitDiver® mobile apps. She widely published with more than 125 articles for diving publications and blogs. For more information or to contact Gretchen, visit www.scubafit.com.

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