



# **GOLD MEDAL BODIES**

Flexibility Resource Guide

## GMB Flexibility Resource Guide

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Ryan C. Hurst, Jarlo L. Ilano, PT, MPT, OCS, & Andy Fossett

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# INTRODUCTION

With very few exceptions, just about everyone who buys one of our programs, peruses our free information, or lands on our website for some other reason have one thing in common:

**They want to get more flexible.**

And if you're reading this guide, you probably do too.

We only sell one program that specifically addresses flexibility - but flexibility is an element of training that is near and dear to our hearts, and it really runs through ALL our programs, not just Focused Flexibility. Flexibility issues are so pervasive that we really can't neglect them in our programs.

In any case, it's probably safe to assume you're looking to improve your flexibility in particular areas of your body, and you'll definitely get some good tips to help you in this guide.

**But what exactly is flexibility? What is stretching?**

These may seem like simple questions, but it's really fundamental to understand the answers to them if you want to have the best chance of success.

## What is Flexibility?

First, let's talk about what flexibility is not.

### It's Not About The Splits

A common misconception is, in order to be considered flexible, you have to be able to get into the full splits. This is wrong on so many levels.

For some reason, people are obsessed with the splits, and they think the splits are the only measure of flexibility.

In reality, flexibility is about A LOT more than the splits, and chances are, you have zero need to be able to do the splits anyway. After all, stretching is a means to an end, and the stretching you do should always contribute to your end goal.

So, if your goal is to be able to do a really solid handstand, but you have stiffness in your shoulders that limits your movement ability, you need to [focus on shoulder flexibility](#) - and practicing the splits will not help you get there.

Many people also think of flexibility in very black-and-white terms - either you're flexible, or you're not. Well, that's not how it works at all. Flexibility is relative to your particular needs and your particular goals.

**Examine why you want to get flexible in the first place, assess your needs, and make sure your flexibility practice serves your goals.**

## How It Works

So, now onto what flexibility is.

A lot of the quicker gains in flexibility appear to be from a change in the default tone in your muscles. The nervous system input to your muscles controls the state of your muscles and how much it is contracted or relaxed. There is a certain level of this tone whenever you are awake and moving around.

Stretching appears to affect this nervous system input to the muscles, so that there is less resistance to lengthening changes.

This has a lot to do with the phenomenon of people that are just "tight," who seem to be bound up and have difficulty with flexibility as a rule, and even more difficulty in trying to change it. Perhaps because of a combination of genetic predisposition, habitual patterns, and personality, they are quite a bit less flexible than "normal".

Actual soft tissue (tendon, ligament, muscle, fascia, etc.) change is the much debated part of this conversation. *Imagine screaming and flying fists at national conferences. (Well, maybe not that bad...)*

It is reasonable to say though, that the scarring and adhesions that happen from soft tissue damage can be affected through exercise. Either earlier in the time after injury, when the tissue is more pliable, or in the case of chronic issues, actually restarting an inflammatory cycle so that the tissue can heal in a better fashion.

But again, whatever the case, worry less on the exact particulars, and focus on making the changes for your goals. That's the most important thing.

## The Flexibility Controversy

It's very interesting (to us anyway!) how much of a controversy there is surrounding the practice of stretching and increasing flexibility.

### IT SEEMS PRETTY SIMPLE:

- ★ If you want to get flexible, you gotta "stretch it out!"

The main issues are the physiological processes involved in improving range of motion. There is conflicting research over what is happening with changes in flexibility, what in particular is being lengthened, and whether anything is being lengthened at all. It's enough to make your head spin, if you think about it too much!

So our advice is not to dwell on it.

Focus on the changes you see within yourself, establish some kind of baseline measurement (such as we provide in the Basic Assessment Positions Protocol of Focused Flexibility) of your condition, go through a program for a reasonable period of time, and assess how you feel after that.

Odds are you'll be doing and feeling better, and that's the bottom line.

## How To Use This Guide

So, now that you know what flexibility is, and what it isn't, it's time to figure out how to incorporate flexibility work into your life in a safe and effective manner.

This guide was designed to take the guess work out of the equation. We'll give you a clear understanding of the areas of the body that tend to cause the most trouble, and we'll give you some exercises to implement. Don't try to take on too much. There is a lot of information in here, and trying to incorporate everything will just get you in trouble.

To try to avoid information overload, we've separated the "Problem Areas" portion of this guide into sections.

Feel free to skip ahead to the section that is most problematic for you before reading through the other sections.

**Even if every one of these areas presents issues for you, take on one thing at a time.**

Trying to do all the stretches discussed throughout this guide will just overwhelm you and tire you out. So pace yourself.

## Problem Areas

Any individual can have limited range of motion in just about any part of the body, but there are definitely some common denominators for most people with flexibility issues.

The bottom line is most people in today's world spend most of their time sitting (in a chair, in the car, etc), which is a fairly recent phenomenon.



Photo credit: [ianus](#)

Not surprisingly, all sorts of research is coming out in recent years suggesting that all this sitting is pretty bad for long-term health. The short-term deficits, though, really don't need research to back them up.

Just think about it - when you've been sitting for 2 or 3 hours straight, your body feels tight and uncomfortable when you stand up.

**Even if the initial discomfort goes away after a few minutes, the tightness from sitting for so long, day-in and day-out, accumulates and can cause some more severe problems.**

## Taking Action

In this guide, we'll cover the five areas of the body that tend to give people the most problems.

Then, we'll discuss the specific issues surrounding each particular area of the body, and leave you with a few exercises to practice for each one.



## CHAPTER TWO: HIPS

### An Overview of the Hips

It's difficult to exaggerate the importance of hip flexibility and strength for every athletic activity.

The hips provide most of the incredible power and force that our lower body can generate for running and jumping, and deficiencies in strength and flexibility in this area of the body can mean the difference between a winning performance or a painful end to the game.

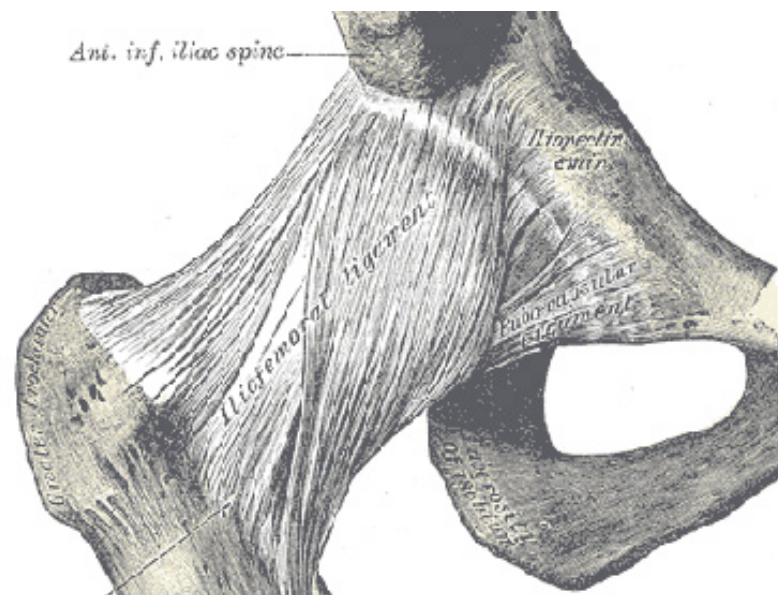
Beyond athletic activities, though, issues with your hips can negatively impact your daily life.

#### POSSIBLE ISSUES INCLUDE:

- ★ Pain
- ★ Decreased mobility for activities such as stooping and squatting
- ★ Difficulty with simple daily encounters such as jumping over a puddle in the street

Below, we'll share some essential points about the hips that can help you understand a bit more about what's happening in this area and how it can impact your training and life.

### Let's Take a Look at Hip Structure



*This is just one part of the complex hip joint.  
Photo credit: [Wikipedia](#)*

When our clients describe some of their hip issues to us, they can point to a pretty wide area that seems to be anywhere from right below their low back to the middle of their legs.

And actually, because of all the various muscles and structures in the region, that's very reasonable.

Though the hip joint itself refers to the femoral head (the “ball” on the top of your leg) connecting to the acetabulum (the “socket”) of the pelvis, it really is a much bigger area than you might think, especially when we account for the large amount of myofascial structures surrounding the joint.

**JUST TO GIVE YOU A PICTURE OF WHAT’S SHAKING IN YOUR HIP, HERE’S A LIST OF THE RELEVANT MUSCLES:**

- ★ **Hip Flexors** (rectus femoris, pectineus, psoas, iliacus, tensor fascia lata)
- ★ **Hip Extensors** (gluteus maximus, semitendinosus, semimembranosus, biceps femoris)
- ★ **Hip Rotators and Abductors** (quadratus femoris, obturator internus, gemilli, gluteus medius, gluteus minimus, piriformis, sartorius)
- ★ **Hip Adductors** (adductor longus, adductor brevis, adductor magnus, obturator externus, gracilis)

All of these muscles support and allow the hip to move and generate force in a variety of angles and positions.

Weakness and decreased flexibility in any of these muscles can compromise performance and possibly generate pain through inappropriate stress and strain from normal daily and recreational activities.

## The Hip vs. the Shoulder

Compared to the shoulder joint (which we’ll get to later), the hip is much bigger and sits more deeply in the socket.

Because the hips have to carry the majority of our bodyweight through thousands of steps a day, they need to be quite stable, whereas the shoulders need to be more mobile in order to move our hands through all our daily tasks.

This isn’t to say that hip mobility isn’t as important as hip stability, especially when we consider that we want to do much more than just walk or stand all day.

**Flexible hips are necessary for most movement and skill-oriented exercise modalities you might be interested in pursuing.**

The ligaments of the hip are also much thicker and stronger than the shoulders because of the larger amounts of strain and pressure in this area.

You generally only see hip ligament issues due to high force trauma or moderate force, repetitive overuse in sports that require a lot of jumping/landing, and force production in supranormal ranges of motion (such as with dancers, track and field athletes, martial and performing artists).

## The Two Most Common Hip Complaints

### THE TWO PRIMARY COMPLAINTS WHEN IT COMES TO THE HIP ARE:

1. **Muscle strains** (in the hamstrings, hip adductors, flexors), due to unfamiliar exertion or overuse, with the root cause of poor movement patterns as a result of deficient strength, flexibility, and/or coordination
2. **Hip tightness**

Perhaps it's because of all the sitting we do, in our cars, at our desks at work, and on the couch plopped in front of the TV, but we lose a lot of the natural hip flexibility we had as children.

Unless your day job has you squatting and twisting on a regular basis, it'd do us well to take our hips through a much greater range of motion than is needed for our daily tasks alone.

**Decreased strength is a concern as well, since the big (and small) muscles surrounding the hip need more stimulation than is gained from everyday walking.**

The prevalence of hamstring and groin strains in “weekend warriors” is a testament to how poorly conditioned we are for more athletic activities when we spend 6 days out of 7 sitting on our butts.

It would be oversimplifying to the point of error to generally identify particular hip muscles as either weak or tight.

For example, most people think they have [tight hamstrings](#), but in reality many of these people actually have weak hamstrings and weak glutes.

Tightness doesn't necessarily go along with strength, nor flexibility with weakness. It is entirely possible, and likely more probable, to be both tight and weak simultaneously, especially at the hips.

## How to Build Strong and Flexible Hips

So, you know by now that, to build the healthiest hips possible, they need to be both strong and flexible - one or the other won't cut it.

In the following videos, I'll show you some exercise variations to improve these attributes.

These exercises will help you address the various weaknesses and inflexibilities that tend to build up over years of misuse and poor movement patterns.

### Hip Flexibility Training Video

I've shown a variety of stretches and flexibility exercises in previous posts (you can find those [here](#) and [here](#)), and there's literally no end to flexibility material on YouTube and other sites online.

So, in this video, I wanted to share some twists on old standbys to demonstrate how to approach flexibility training in a less regimented and more exploratory manner.



Watch the full video here: [Hip Flexibility Video](#)

In general, I suggest moving in and out of a stretch a few times before holding the position for 30 seconds or longer.

This serves as both a warmup and as a natural priming for the muscles to accept a stretch without the natural reflex resistance.

**Don't worry about sets and reps and hold times; instead, re-frame stretching as experimenting with different angles and positions.**

From time to time we get comments from people that they “can’t even get into the starting position” of some of the stretches we show. Well really, the starting position is wherever you can start it.

The idea is not to mimic the exercises exactly but to begin wherever you can, and go from there. *[If you’re having a lot of trouble with this, turn to the Troubleshooting section of this guide.]*

## Hip Strength Training Video

The standard big strength moves such as squats and lunges are important pieces for building great hip and leg strength, but be wary of training the same patterns over and over again.

It’s nothing to do with “muscle confusion” or any nonsense like that; rather, it’s that we tend to form fixed movement patterns with consistent repetition of any skill.

### Consistent repetition is the basis of motor learning!

This concept is important when trying to learn new movements and/or skills. Yet, this is a double edged sword as every repeated movement gets ingrained and fixed, even if we don’t necessarily benefit from the move and even if it’s

harmful. It is generally desirable to be able to have as much freedom of movement as possible within safe ranges of motion that do not compromise our joints, ligaments, and other connective tissues.

We can accomplish this by changing position and angle of force during our exercises. This stimulates not just the local muscle, but also the neurological connections [between the respective body areas and the brain](#).

In this video I’ll show you a few new ways to change up classic leg strength exercises. Give these a test run and let it inspire you to create some variations of your own.



Watch the full video here: [Hip Strength Video](#)

Again, don't worry too much about sets or reps.

Just see this as an opportunity to *practice*. Too often we find ourselves performing the same movements every day.

Absorbed in the routine of work and home life, we lose sight of our hips' incredible potential strength and mobility. Spend even just ten to fifteen minutes a day on fundamental and creative hip exercises and you'll notice a dramatic increase in your ability to move your whole body strongly and gracefully.

Poor movement involves a combination of strength, flexibility, and motor control/coordination so it behooves us to work on a diverse range of movement and exercise, both to keep us motivated and optimally functioning.

## Try it Out!: A 3-Minute Solution for Tight Hips

### TRY THIS SIMPLE EXERCISE:

- ★ Stand with your feet hip-width apart.
- ★ Squat down as low as you can.
- ★ Stand back up.

If you're anything like the majority of people living in modern Western culture, you probably had some (or perhaps a lot of) difficulty squatting deeply.

The most likely culprit? **Tight hips.**

And even if you had no difficulty at all with the squat, you may have other limitations caused by tight hips. In modern Western culture, where people spend a lot of time sitting in chairs, the hips can be a real problem area for people. Some of the side effects of tight hips can be back pain, shooting pain in the legs, poor posture, limited mobility, and general feelings of discomfort when we move around. Interestingly, in cultures where people sit on the floor or squat on the ground, hip area tightness and the related issues are less common.

Let's attack the problem right at the source: sitting.

## Seated Stretches For Chronic Sitters

*(say that five times fast...)*

I've tried telling people before to spend less time sitting down, but for people with desk jobs or those who drive a lot, it just isn't possible to move around as often as you'd like.

**Well if you're going to be sitting down, you may as well do something good for you at the same time.**

In this video, I'll show you several great hip stretches you can do while sitting down. Your coworkers probably won't even notice, so try to fit these into your day as often as you feel is helpful.



*Demo of Stretch #2*

Watch the full video here: [Chronic Sitter Video](#)

### STRETCH #1

1. Cross one ankle over the opposite knee, while sitting.
2. Using your hand to assist, glide your crossed leg down towards the floor, then up again, to move in and out of the tight areas of your hip.
3. Lean your body forward into your hip to increase the stretch. Continue for a minute or so, then switch to the opposite leg.



**STRETCH #2**

1. Straighten one leg on the ground in front of you and cross the opposite leg over the straight leg.
2. Lean your torso forward into the bent leg, then straighten your body.
3. Continue this pulsation for about a minute.
4. Hold the last pulsation for a few seconds before switching to the opposite leg.

**STRETCH #3**

1. Move your body over to one side of your chair so that one leg is hanging down off the chair.
2. Bend the hanging leg so that your thigh is perpendicular to the floor and your foot is behind you.
3. Lean your body forward and backward in small motions, gliding through the tightness.
4. For the last pulsation, hold your body in the backward position for a few seconds before moving to the opposite leg.

If you practice these stretches for three minutes everyday, your hip flexibility and overall wellbeing will likely improve dramatically. Three minutes is not a long time to commit to.

Try doing these stretches everyday for a month and see how you feel.



# CHAPTER THREE: SHOULDERS

## An Overview of the Shoulders

The scapulae, or shoulder blades, are surrounded by 16 major muscles. These muscles are responsible for controlling the upper extremities, and even play a role in lower extremity stabilization and movement (by attaching the scapula to the pelvis).

### What Happens When They're Out of Whack?

It's very common for people to have malfunctioning scapular muscles, primarily due to sitting too much.

Prolonged sitting (in front of a computer, for example) encourages thoracic flexion and scapular protraction. Over time, the muscles become more and more dysfunctional, and movement in this area becomes limited.

When the shoulder blades and their surrounding muscles are limited or tight, it will negatively affect your posture, your level of pain, and your ability to perform many (if not most) exercises properly.

#### FOR EXAMPLE:

- ★ When trying to do a pull up, you may not be able to achieve full flexion of the shoulder.
- ★ Your limited mobility will make it difficult to perform a proper handstand.
- ★ You may not be able to do many movements on the parallettes, as you won't be able to fully depress your shoulders.

#### AND OUTSIDE OF EXERCISE-RELATED LIMITATIONS, YOU MAY EXPERIENCE THE FOLLOWING:

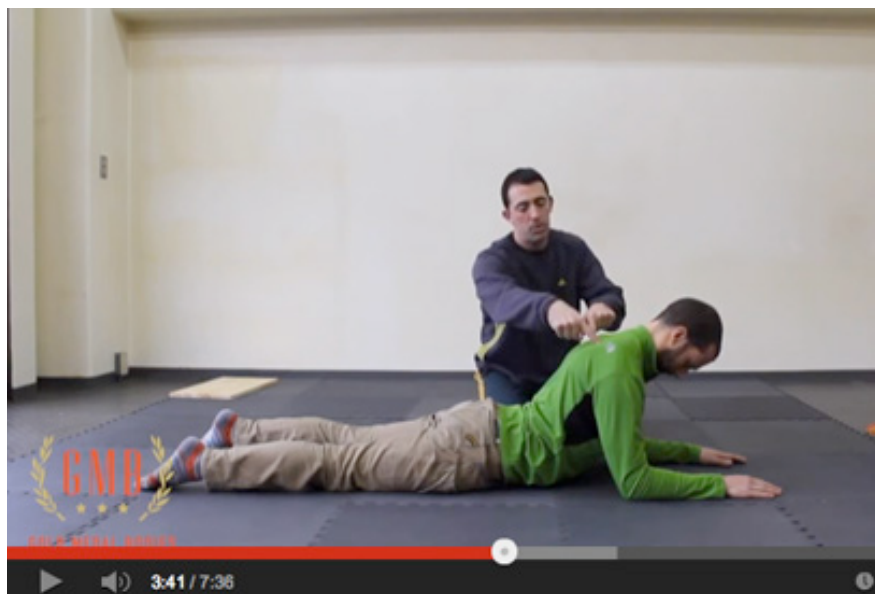
- ★ Difficulty reaching to get something off a high shelf.
- ★ Pain when lifting heavy objects.

**In other words, if your scapular mobility is limited, your whole life will probably be affected – and in a bad way.**

So, let's get down to business and fix up those muscles!

## How to Stretch for Scapular Mobility

In this video, Ryan will show you three variations of a stretch that will work the entire chain of muscles surrounding the scapulae.



*Demo of Progression #1*

Watch the full video here: [Scapular Mobility Video](#)

This stretch targets those vital muscles surrounding the shoulder blades that allow for proper movement of the upper extremities when fully functional.

Because this stretch is quite difficult for many people, Ryan has broken it down into three progressions.

Work on the first progression until you feel ready to move up to the next level, and so on.

### PROGRESSION #1

1. Start by lying down on your belly.
2. Keeping your belly on the mat, come up on your elbows.
3. Make sure your shoulders are directly above your elbows, keeping your elbows bent at 90 degrees.
4. Push away from the ground with your elbows, rounding your back while keeping your head neutral. *(Remember, keep your elbows at the same angle, and keep your belly on the mat.)*
5. Hold for 3-5 seconds, then relax down.
6. Squeeze your shoulder blades together, hold for 3-5 seconds, then relax.
7. Repeat 5 times.

### PROGRESSION #2

1. Get down on your hands and knees, keeping your knees bent at a 90-degree angle and your shoulders directly above your wrists.
2. Without moving the rest of your body, including your hips, push into the ground with your hands and round your back towards the ceiling.

3. Focus on relaxing the lower back, and only rounding your upper back.
4. Hold this rounded position for 5 seconds, focusing on opening up the back as much as possible.
5. Relax, then drop your chest down to the floor, drawing your shoulder blades toward each other.
6. Make sure to keep your stomach tight and neutral, keeping the movement at the chest and upper back.
7. Keep your arms straight throughout the movement.
8. Hold the arched position for about 5 seconds, and then relax.
9. Repeat 5 times.

### PROGRESSION #3

1. Come into a plank position with your feet together.
2. Lock out your knees, squeeze your butt, and pull your heels back.
3. With your hips locked into place, push away from the floor with your hands, rounding your back. Keep your head neutral.
4. Hold for 5 seconds, then relax your shoulders.
5. Again, keeping your hips in place and your arms locked out, drop your chest towards the floor.
6. Bring your shoulder blades towards each other, squeezing those muscles.
7. Hold for 5 seconds, then relax.
8. Repeat 5 times.

### Get Those Shoulders Movin'!

You'll notice these progressions look very similar to one another.

That's because they're *progressions*.

It's up to you to figure out what level you're starting from, and which progression you are ready for. Of course, we're always here to help out, but your success with this stretch, like everything else in fitness, comes down to feeling your own limitations, and figuring out what you need to work on.

With that said, as you move through these progressions, you will find that, over time, your mobility and posture will improve. Your pain should decrease, and your ability to do all the exercises you want to do will drastically increase.

So stick with this stretch, do it daily and as often as you feel you need to, and you'll feel the positive effects in no time.

## Try it Out!: A 3-Minute Solution for Tight Shoulders

Some of the most popular search terms that bring people to our site are related in one way or another to addressing flexibility issues.

The reason for this is people in today's working world are plagued with stiffness and tightness in certain parts of their bodies from sitting in front of a computer all day.

One of the most common problem people encounter is shoulder tension and stiffness. When we sit in front of a computer for too many hours a day without addressing mobility issues on a regular basis, we end up with hunched shoulders and a tilted head, tightened up in some areas and overstretched in others.

So what can we do to alleviate these tensions? Well, as the saying goes, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

**It is best to nip these accumulating tensions in the bud, rather than wait until pain and dysfunction starts.**

### A COUPLE OF IMPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND BEFORE STARTING THE EXERCISES:

- ★ Perform these exercises with pulsing movements in and out of the stretch for 30 seconds, then hold in a static stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Do 2 sets like this for every hour or two you are sitting down.
- ★ The pulsing movements serve to improve circulation and decrease pain at the target muscles, and the static hold of a stretch can effect a change in tight neck and shoulder girdle muscles that can restrict mobility.



*Demo of Stretch #3*

Watch the full video here: [Tight Shoulder Video](#)

**STRETCH #1**

1. While standing, put one arm behind your back with your palm facing outward, making sure to keep your shoulders down and back.
2. Turn your head in the opposite direction and move your neck up and down in slight, pulsing movements, while using your opposite arm to anchor away from your head.
3. After pulsing for about 30 seconds, hold the stretch statically, using your hand to deepen the stretch.
4. Repeat on the opposite side.

**STRETCH #2**

1. Extend one arm across the front of your body and use the opposite hand to pull the arm right above the elbow.
2. Pulse your arm towards and away from your body for about 30 seconds, while looking straight ahead.
3. Hold statically, then switch to the opposite side.

**STRETCH #3**

1. While seated, clasp your hands behind you and extend them upwards while leaning your body forward into your legs.
2. Lock your elbows out and move your arms up and down in a slight, pulsing motion.
3. Hold statically, then release.

You can perform these simple exercises anywhere and they are especially well suited for taking a quick stretch break at the office, without having to keep a yoga mat by your desk!

Give these exercises a try, and feel your shoulder and neck tension melt away!

# CHAPTER FOUR: BACK

## An Overview of the Back

The “back” is a pretty complicated structure comprising dozens of joints, muscles, and other structures that make moving throughout your everyday life possible and enjoyable.

Here’s a general rundown of what’s going on between your neck and your legs.

### The Spine

The spine can be separated into functional units of bones and assorted soft tissue stacked on top of each other.

- ★ The bony parts of the spine are the vertebrae, and with one on top of the other you have the disc in between and two joints from the processes jutting out from the body of the vertebrae.
- ★ The disc is a tough tissue with a viscous gel inside. Think of a jelly donut but instead of the fried goodness on the outside, it’s as tough as a tire, and with a much thicker jelly inside than you’d want in your sandwich.

The way the joints are lined up differ depending on the location in the spine.

- ★ In the neck the joints are angled down and back at ~45 degrees (at an oblique angle), so you can equally rotate, sidebend, flex and extend. Your neck needs to be super moveable and that’s what we’ve got.
- ★ In the midback (thoracic) spine, the angle shifts a bit so it’s designed better for forward and sidebending with less rotation.
- ★ And in the lower back (lumbar), the angle is close to 90 degrees so you have even more bias to forward and backward bending with almost no rotation.

### The Muscles

There are quite a few muscles that attach in a diagonal pattern from joint to joint and these help control those stacked boxes of vertebrae, but the strongest muscles and the ones more prone to being tight are the long muscles that run up and down in the groove of your spine on one side and the other.

**These are part of the culprits that can prevent free movement and make it difficult for you to perform a lot of activities.**

The so-called “core” muscles are the deepest muscles of the low back (multifidi) and the front (transverse abdominus), but there’s a strong case that the muscles of the hips need to be included, because of how much they contribute to a stable house.

## The Sacrum

The sacrum is a slightly concaved structure that is the junction point between the spine and the pelvis.

This “S-I” joint sits below the spine and is in between the hips.

These joints primarily cause an issue if they are too flexible as in the case of pregnant women and those with trauma to the area.

## Why Your Back is Tight, and Some Stretches to Fix That

Years ago, “work” meant physical labor, almost exclusively.

People were farmers, miners, welders – in other words, their daily work involved constant activity. But that definition of work is a long-forgotten dream. Now, if you’re lucky, your desk is far enough away from the bathroom that you have to walk at least a few steps every day.

The result of sitting at a desk all day is we end up having tightness and often pain in certain parts of our bodies – our hips, our shoulders, and in the low back.

Low back tightness is one of the most common complaints we hear.

The lower back absorbs a tremendous amount of tension, as it bears the weight of your body sitting in a chair all day.

- ★ In the short term, low back tightness can be nagging and uncomfortable.
- ★ In the long term, it could lead to more severe physical ailments.

Below, we'll go through some exercises to help alleviate some of that low back tightness.

**A COUPLE OF IMPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND BEFORE STARTING THE EXERCISES:**

- ★ Perform these exercises with pulsing movements in and out of the stretch for 30 seconds, then hold in a static stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Do 2 sets like this for every hour or two you are sitting down.
- ★ The pulsing movements serve to improve circulation and decrease pain at the target muscles, and the static hold of a stretch can effect a change in tight muscles that can restrict mobility.



*Demo of Stretch #1*

Watch the full video here: [Low Back Stretch Video](#)

**STRETCH #1**

1. Push your chair away from your desk so you have enough space to lean your body forward over legs, touching your hands to the ground.
2. As you exhale, round your back, feeling a good stretch in your lower back muscles.
3. As you inhale, flatten your back to relax your lower back muscles.
4. Continue this breathing pattern for about 30 seconds, then hold in the rounded position for another 30 seconds.

**STRETCH #2**

1. Starting in the same position with your body leaned over your legs, place your elbows on your knees.
2. As you breathe out, round your back, and as you inhale, arch your back by pushing through your elbows.
3. Continue this for 30 seconds, then hold in the arched position for another 30 seconds before relaxing.



**STRETCH #3**

1. Bring one elbow across the opposite knee, and your other hand on your hip.
2. Push your elbow and your hand into the side you are turned towards to turn your body further towards the back.
3. Continue this pulsation for about 15 seconds, then hold statically for about 15 seconds.
4. Switch to the opposite side.

**STRETCH #4**

1. Lift your butt off the chair, starting in a squatting position, with your elbows resting on your knees.
2. Using your elbows, straighten your knees as much as you can, trying to bring your hips directly above your knees and ankles.
3. Continue by bending and straightening your knees slowly for about 30 seconds, then hold in the straightened position for another 30 seconds.

As with any tightness issues, the best way to prevent any long-term issues is to stop the tension from compounding in the first place. These exercises are a great way to address low back tightness in an easy, portable way. Try these during a short break at your desk, and stop back pain in its tracks!

## Try it Out!: 3 Simple Ways to Improve Your Posture

We all know that *posture* is important.

You've probably tried to improve your posture before by forcing yourself to hold your body in a way that it naturally fights against.

In the video below, I'll explain a bit about why your body fights back and how to begin removing those impediments to healthy posture.

### Can Stretching Improve Your Posture?

So there are two sides (literally) to the (figurative) postural coin.

1. Strengthening the weak muscles that aren't holding you up correctly, and
2. Releasing the tight muscles that want to hold you improperly.

You can build strength in your weaker areas by focusing on performing movements with care and control. Doing exercises with good form is usually the best way to build strength for good posture.

In [Focused Flexibility](#), we get into the specifics of how to teach your body to relax into better posture, but here are some tips you can use now.

### 3 Simple Tips To Improve Your Posture Right Away

1. Find the middle position between an extreme military style posture and one where you are slumped so much you could fall over.
2. Set a timer/alarm (there are even some apps that do this) to remind you to check on your posture every hour while you work.
3. Most postural issues involve muscle tightness, common areas include the front of the shoulders and chest and [hips](#), and the back of the neck down to the shoulders. Spend some time improving the flexibility in these spots and you'll find it easier to rest in better posture.

Here's a tutorial on one of our favorite [exercises for improving posture, and releasing shoulder tension](#) common to most people who work at a desk all day.



Watch the full video here: [Lounge Chair Stretch](#)

### How to Improve Posture Permanently

The most important thing for long lasting improvement in posture is increasing your awareness of your body positions and your flexibility in your most commonly tight areas.

Any good training program will develop that body awareness if you do the exercises with proper form.

# CHAPTER FIVE: HAMSTRINGS

## An Overview of the Hamstrings

Got tight hamstrings? You're not alone.



*Not quite here yet? That's okay, we can help.*

*Photo credit: [Keith Allison](#)*

Hamstring flexibility is a concern for many people, and we know how difficult it can be to resolve the issue. It can often seem like there are just two kinds of people in the world - flexible people and those who... well, aren't.

This distinction seems especially noticeable when you fall into the "not flexible" camp.

So what's the deal?

Is it true that some people are just born stiff and tight?

**WELL, THERE ARE A FEW FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A LACK OF FLEXIBILITY, SUCH AS:**

- ★ Truly tight hamstrings
- ★ Prior injuries
- ★ Decreased back/pelvis mobility
- ★ Overwork
- ★ Improper training

Let's take a look at some of these factors and some strategies you can employ to improve your hamstring flexibility.

## What “Tight Hamstrings” Really Are

First of all, are your hamstrings really the problem?

This may seem silly or obvious, but just because you can't touch your toes doesn't necessarily mean your hamstrings are to blame for your limited range of motion.

There can be quite a few structures in your “posterior chain” that are limiting your movement (especially if you have a job that requires you to sit or drive for long periods of time).

- ★ For example, your calves (gastrocnemius muscles) cross the knee joint, so restrictions there can make keeping your knees straight harder than it should be.
- ★ Also, the connections from your deep [hip muscles](#) (glutes, piriformis, gemelli, etc.) can affect the ease in which your pelvis tilts, thus affecting how you bend forward at the hip.
- ★ Another factor could be the tightness of the fascial interconnections between your muscle groups (picture this as your muscles being “stuck together,” and thus they don't slide freely beside each other).

- ★ Then there are joint restrictions at your lower back and pelvis, which can cause increased tension throughout your hips and legs. With these, people often feel much more freedom in their motion after doing exercises that limber up the spine (without stretching their legs much at all).

Or it could be a combination of all of the above, which is definitely common with flexibility issues.

So, yes your [hamstrings](#) may be tight, but that might just be a small part of the problem (an outward symptom) and you'd want to address all of these issues first.

How should you go about doing that?

It's simple! We'll show you.

## 6 Tips To Relax Those Hamstrings

Here are a few tips to improve your movement and flexibility now, and get rid of that “ropes in the back of the legs” feeling.

### Tip #1: Don't Force It

You've heard this advice before (we're sure) and probably ignored it.

You may have thought, “If I just work on it harder and push through, my flexibility will improve.” But the trouble with this philosophy is that when you're working on flexibility, your muscles (and nerves) aren't passive structures.

**So, stretching too forcefully or too quickly will activate a “stretch reflex,” which increases muscle tension and resists the stretch.**

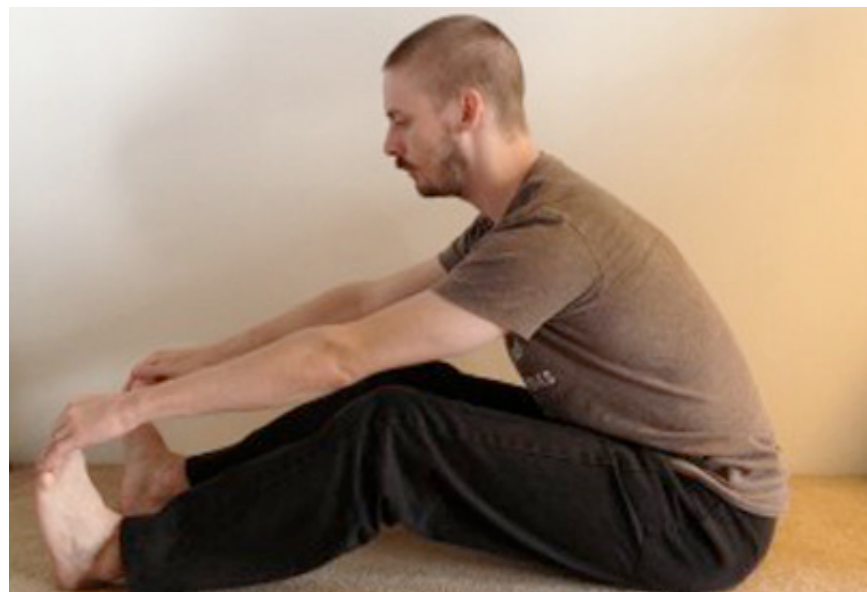
Don't fight yourself on this one!

### HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN TRY INSTEAD:

1. Pick a stretch, and rock slowly back and forth into the stretch several times.
2. Focus on having an even, steady breath.
3. Every few repetitions, hold the stretch for a bit and see where you're at.

After a 30 seconds or so, you'll likely find yourself further into the stretch with much less strain than before. Easy, right?

### Tip #2: Bend Your Knees



*Yup, go ahead, it's fine.*

Bending forward with straight legs is great if you can do it, but otherwise it's not the best choice if you're having trouble moving even a few inches forward in the straight leg stretch position.

So, bend your knees and take the slack off the calves and hamstring attachments at your knees.

Focus instead on maintaining a flat or slightly arched back, and keep your chest up and hinge forward at your hips.

### Tip #3: Work On Other Areas First

As we mentioned earlier, the source of your flexibility issues could be the result of the other areas of your body, rather than just your hamstrings.

Try working on some simple back, hip, and calf stretches before your usual hamstring work – you'll probably notice you have freer motion right away!

### Tip #4: Don't Hold So Long

The results of many flexibility research studies have consistently shown minimal benefits for holding a position longer than 15 – 30 seconds.

**This is why we recommend doing shorter holds with more repetitions (especially if you're just starting out with flexibility work).**

Longer holds may be helpful if you're working on a specific issue (and *after* you've already spending some time working on shorter holds), but don't spend minutes in a position in an attempt to improve.

## Tip #5: Follow Up With Active, Dynamic Movements

Have you ever noticed that your flexibility gains from an earlier training session seem to disappear once you try to work on the position again?

This can be frustrating, and this phenomenon is often caused by a lack of increased movement in this new range of motion.

What does that mean? **Use it or lose it**, of course!

**The retention of range of motion requires active use in the new range, otherwise your body reverts back to your old range of motion in that position.**

Essentially, you need to re-educate your body to move in this new range. Dynamic exercises such as deep squatting, leg swings, full range jumping, and kicking drills work very well.

Keep the intensity low and well within your limits, and *don't stretch before any heavy exercise.*

## Tip #6: Try One Thing At A Time

The five tips listed prior are the best general tips we have to improve your flexibility right now.

**THERE ARE QUITE A FEW OTHER METHODS YOU CAN TRY AS WELL:**

- ★ Foam rollers
- ★ Balls
- ★ Contract-relax stretching
- ★ Tack and stretch

There's nothing wrong with trying any of these methods, but beware of trying everything at once.

If you try out too many methods at once, you won't know which method in particular works best for you, or worse, you won't know which thing could possibly set you back.

Give one method a shot by itself for a couple of weeks and recheck.

## CHAPTER SIX: TROUBLESHOOTING

**The best thing to do to improve flexibility is simply to start and be as consistent as you can.**

A little bit every day is much better than a lot once a month.

Gaining flexibility takes time and patience and sometimes all there is to it is to keep performing your routine day after day and you'll get where you want to go.

That being said, there are some common concerns that we can help address to make your path as smooth as possible.

### **What if I can't get into the right positions?**

Well, there really is no "wrong" position.

**Your starting point is wherever you start** and if you can't perfectly match the positions of a particular stretch without pain or if you're simply unable to do it, then you'll have to make adjustments.

Different stretches have different emphases and it may be that you have to work on your tightest areas first before you can work on the specific form of one stretch.

Using a diagnostic self assessment like the BAP (Basic Assessment Positions) Protocol from [Focused Flexibility](#), helps you to identify your most restricted areas.

Work on these first and you'll find yourself able to attain other stretch positions later.

### **What if it hurts?**

Then you gotta stop. **Seriously.**

An increase of pain (beyond a temporary and quick sensation) during stretching exercise is not just unhelpful, **it's detrimental and will stop your progress in its tracks.**

Back off in the stretch, use a variation of the stretch, or move on to a completely different exercise if you have pain. It'd also be a good idea to get checked out by a health care professional if your pain continues.



## What if I don't make progress?

First, back up a bit and analyze if your definition of progress is realistic.

If you've been "tight" your whole life, then expecting miraculous changes in two weeks is not appropriate. Unfortunately there are very few legitimate "quick fixes" for flexibility.

**Within three weeks of working your flexibility program, you should see good changes, not crazy spectacular change (though some might), but enough to know that you are on the right track.**

If you have been working on it for a good amount of time and have realistic expectations but are still spinning your wheels, then you'll have to look at the structure and performance of your stretching regimen.

- ★ Are you working on the appropriate exercises?
- ★ Are you using the right protocol that suits you individually?
- ★ Are there issues in your technique and form?

These are all questions that you'll need to explore and assess to find the best solution for you.

We've provided a lot of information in this resource guide, but for the finer (and more personalized) details, you'll have to seek out the right coaches and be more aware of how you move.

## What are the best stretches for (insert goal/body part here)?

Again, there are likely no single "best" stretches for any particular body part or specific goal set.

Every individual can have separate needs, and reactions to what looks like the same exercise can vary greatly from person to person.

As mentioned before, a self-assessment and benchmark points of progress will tell you a lot about where you should start and how you react to your training. There are indeed some better stretches than others, but a large part of that is dependent upon the individuals' condition and reaction to one stretch vs. another.

The variety of stretches we've shared here have helped many people, but you may need further variations based on your goals and progress.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL

So you've read through this guide and you're ready to jump right in with some new ideas on flexibility training, but what determines your success?

Is it the particular program you're on, or is it how you approach it?

Granted some methods of flexibility training are better than others, or rather are *better for you* specifically than others. But to get the most out of any plan of action, there are a few things you should keep in mind.

### Find Your Match

The most important thing is to consider whether the particular approach to flexibility is aligned with your goals.

What is the intended outcome of the approach and how does it relate to what you hope to achieve?

**The end result of a flexibility program should have more specific outcomes than just the generic "get more flexible."**

Once you decide what your particular goals are, you need to examine the details of your program.

Every particular exercise routine comes out of an underlying philosophy, and the same is true for all flexibility programs. Whoever designed the program has a specific set of beliefs about why their program works, or should work.

**The best program in the world is no good if you can't follow through with it.**

For example, some regimens follow a style which emphasize high frequency and high volume.

- ★ In this system, daily, or several times a week, training for a few hours a day is considered optimal. And it may well be, if you are able to commit the time.

Another system focuses on shorter and less frequent training, but insists upon going all out in the training, with a high level of exertion at every workout.

- ★ According to that training philosophy and no matter how you feel, if you aren't training at 100 percent, you're not expending enough effort to make gains. Some people thrive on this, and some people don't.

Take some time to think about your temperament and how you'll handle a program for the long term.

- ★ Will you be able to consistently devote several days a week to training?
- ★ Is it in your mental makeup to go at it hard in every workout session?

Is this program a good fit? If you are being honest with yourself, and feel you match the regimen well, then that's what you should do.

## Follow the Plan

So you've figured out the best program that's a fit for you and your goals.

**Now you just have to do it!**



*Don't get all willy nilly with it, it's important to follow instructions!*

*Photo credit: Purple Penning*

Along with the philosophy, each regimen has a plan of attack and a timeline. It's more than just a promise, the very act of having a deadline itself is part of a good program. Having an endpoint gives an impetus to your training and provides a sense of purpose and motivation.

It's much easier to keep running if you can see the finish line up ahead.

Within reason, you should follow the chosen plan as closely as possible. The best plans were designed the way they are for good reasons, and yes there should be concessions to individual concerns such as injuries and such factors, but you're on the program, so [you should go ahead and do it the right way.](#)

Give the method its due and follow it to the letter.

## Consistency is the Key to Success

You've chosen the plan, and you're diligently following the instructions as best you can. Now you have to keep at it!

Our clients often ask us how they should start back up on their exercise routine (or start one altogether) after their rehab is done. Most of them are eager to get to it since they are feeling better and ready to move on.

### OUR ADVICE IS ALWAYS TO:

- ★ “Do half as much as you think you should on the first day and stop there even if you feel you could keep going. Then see how you feel the next day and go on from there.”

It doesn't matter where you start in your flexibility training, it matters where you end up, and **how you progress all depends on being consistent.**

In all of the regimens we've practiced and ones that we've placed our clients on, the best way we've found to encourage regular performance is the “slow boil” approach.

**Starting off very easy, even ridiculously easy, and building up from there tends to keep people coming back to exercise.**

You've probably seen examples of this all the time.

The New Year's resolution folks in the gym on January 2nd, flailing away at the treadmills and ellipticals with all they got, only to be so sore the next day that they stay home.

**Don't let that happen to you.**

## What to Do When You're Stuck

Does this sound familiar?

*You've chosen the right program, and you're working it correctly and being as consistent as you can, but then you get stuck. What can you do?*

Don't stress – you don't have to get stuck at a plateau in your training!

### TRY THESE TWO TACTICS:

- ★ **Do the bare minimum of all the other exercises in the program:** That way you can spend your energy on that difficult movement.
- ★ **Move that troublesome exercise to the beginning of your workout:** For instance, if you are on a hip flexibility program and one exercise seems to be lagging behind the others, go ahead and do that one first, even if it's scheduled for later.

This strategy helps quite a bit if it's a strength or conditioning issue that's preventing your progress. And being fresher and stronger also helps if it is a technique issue, because it allows you to focus on your form when you aren't concerned about whether your strength is going to hold out.

## "Success is a Series of Little Daily Victories"

We all want to gain as much as possible from our training.

It's only natural to want to make sure that our investment of time and energy isn't wasted.

The strategies I've outlined will help you get the best out of whatever program you've chosen to meet your goals.

**Be sure to choose a plan that's best for you, follow that program as best you can, keep showing up, and devise a strategy to navigate through those periods of "stuckness."**

Frustrations in training are inevitable, it's just the way it is in any kind of training.

And progress isn't always linear. But you can use this feedback to reassess where you are and what you're doing, so that you can keep moving towards achieving your goals.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: HOW TO GET FLEXIBLE FAST

Most of us could stand to be a little more flexible, and some of us more than just a little!

### DO YOU HAVE:

- ★ Tight hamstrings or shoulders?
- ★ Feeling stiff and immobile?
- ★ Random aches and pains?
- ★ Restricted physical movement?

All of these things are common symptoms of poor flexibility.

**If you struggle with being less flexible than you'd like to be, you're not alone.**

Chances are, this is not the first article you've read on [getting more flexible](#), and you may have even have tried, and are continuing to try to stop feeling so tight and bound up.

The problem with most flexibility programs/articles is they present a cookie-cutter approach for everybody in general. And they have to, because it's difficult to prescribe a specific approach if you don't understand an individual's particular needs and current condition.

**The trick to getting flexible fast is figuring out what you need to work on in particular and getting the job done efficiently.**

It takes a bit of [self-reflection and assessment](#) but you'll make much better gains than just following someone else's routine.

In this section, we'll show you four simple steps to rapidly improve YOUR flexibility.

### Why Pressuring Yourself Won't Improve Your Flexibility or Athletic Skill

It seems that as people begin and continue on with their exercise and fitness regimens, they always feel as if they should work on their flexibility, even if they already have a dedicated practice in place.

Why is that? Is it because everybody says you should?

If so, well, **that's not a very good reason**. And maybe you don't have to spend so much time on your flexibility after all.

It seems strange for us to say that, since flexibility training is a big part of our programs here at GMB. But if you are getting through your day and your recreational activities without sensations of stiffness or tightness, then you probably don't need to make flexibility training your top priority.

**If however, you do feel stiffness or tightness and can't seem to put your shoes on in the morning without some serious effort, then some flexibility training may be exactly what you need.**

Below, we'll show you how to improve your flexibility quickly (and safely). It just requires having focus, motivation, and ironically, a lot of patience.

## 4 Steps to Getting Flexible Fast

In our hectic lifestyles, going from home responsibilities to work responsibilities and back again, [we barely have time to get a regular workout routine in.](#)

It's hard enough to find even 45 minutes for the whole training session, let alone another 20 minutes or so to stretch out where we need to.

Instead of wasting time with inefficient, cookie-cutter routines, follow these steps.

### 1. Figure Out Your Flexibility Goal

First of all, let's clarify why you want to stretch and work on your flexibility. There are a lot of reasons floating around out there as to why you should stretch.

- ★ Decrease soreness after a workout
- ★ Decrease risk of injury
- ★ Improve performance
- ★ Improve range of motion
- ★ Reduce pain

Actually, it may be surprising you to learn that the benefits of stretching are controversial and far from conclusive. In fact there is a fair amount of evidence that [stretching isn't as helpful as you'd think](#) for decreasing pain and chance of injury.

In [this exhaustive article](#) the author eventually comes to the conclusion that stretching is only good for improving flexibility... and it “feels pleasant.”

**Well, frankly those are the only reasons to stretch!**

[Our stance on flexibility work](#) is that “if you cannot actively attain a position you’d like, then you need to find a way to get to that range of motion.”

Yes, it really is that simple.



*This is a great movement to practice...if your main goal is to get good at yoga. But if that isn't your goal, you may need to reconsider what you're working towards with all this stretching.*

*Photo credit: Tony Felgueiras*

## SO HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU NEED TO STRETCH?

- ★ If you have poor form in a handstand because your arms don't fully raise above your head, then you need to stretch.
- ★ If you want to play with your kids but you have trouble getting down on the floor because you're too tight, then you need to stretch.

As we've said before, you have to find your [right motivation](#).

Many people may tell you “that you MUST stretch” for a variety of reasons, but don't worry about it. Instead, focus on the motivating factor for you.

Find your own personal reason, as that will get you to your objective much quicker and take you much further than some other contrived justification.



## 2. Determine What's Holding You Back (Where Are You Most Stiff?)

Once you have that goal in mind, you'll next want to find out what in particular is hindering you from achieving it.

**And it's much more than "I have to stretch out more." Sure you do, but do you know what you need to stretch? Everything? Well, that would take a pretty long time!**

It may be that you have a difficult time bending forward to touch your toes, and that would naturally make you think that [your hamstrings are too tight](#) but there are quite a few other things that could be restrictors as well, such as your low back, hip flexors, glutes, etc.

So you'll need a good way to quickly assess what is specifically binding up your movement.

We developed a series of [Basic Assessment Positions](#) that cover the whole body and lead you to find your tightest positions.

You'll start by working on those primary restrictions, as resolving those tends to help everything else as well. It's like

untangling a rope - once you find the primary knot, the rest unravels pretty easily.

The stretching you do will now be more efficient and is the best use of your time, since you'll be working on the most important stretches for your needs.

## 3. Get Flexible Faster By Slowing Down

The difficulty in trying to get flexible as quickly as possible is that most people need to tone it down.

**You don't improve stretching tolerance by going so far that it hurts.**

In fact, that would likely impede your progress. It is both a reflexive and conscious action to draw back from a painful stimulus.

**THE INABILITY TO MOVE IN A CERTAIN RANGE OF MOTION BECAUSE OF “TIGHTNESS” CAN BE RELATED TO SEVERAL FACTORS:**

- ★ Soft tissue scarring (actual structural adhesions preventing motion)
- ★ Joint hypomobility (restrictions at the joint itself due to injury or congenital factors)
- ★ Higher resting muscle tone (the muscle’s resistance to stretch at rest)

The first two factors are best addressed by consulting a professional in person, but the last leads to the reason why most people need to go a bit more slowly in their stretching regimen.

**Muscle tone, not intensity determines your flexibility gains.**

Though there are some medical conditions that can cause a very high muscle tone, most of us just have varying degrees of the level, and this explains why some people are naturally more or less flexible than others.

It’s only natural to go for intensity when you are exercising and are focused on a goal.

This is great for pushing through fatigue to build stamina and endurance but for improving flexibility, fighting this natural tone is a losing battle.

Instead, you are better off coaxing your body into improved flexibility.

**Easing into it rather than going “hardcore” is going to get you better results.** Here’s why.



Watch the full video here: [Get Better Results With Stretching](#)

Across the board, clients that have listened to this advice are achieving much better success.

## HERE'S A QUOTE FROM ONE OF OUR CLIENTS WHO PUT JARLO'S SUGGESTIONS INTO ACTION:

- ★ I took my time and really focused on Jarlo's advice about not pushing. Toward the end I began to feel how my muscles would resist straight pushing but relax into softer rhythmic pushing cycles letting me get deeper. A very nice session. - Kevin K.

There are periods of time where really pushing yourself harder into the stretched position is useful, but these are at more advanced levels of flexibility training.

And by no means will it be the majority of your training, they are done a small percentage of the time to make a small percentage of gains. If you feel so tight that you have trouble touching your toes, you definitely don't need to be doing this style.

## 4. Follow Your Plan As Consistently As Possible

You've now figured out your personal goal, identified your restrictions, and improved your approach to stretching by toning it down. The last, but not least, thing to do is to **follow a consistent plan of attack and do it as regularly as you can.**

Your plan has been formed from your personal goals and mobility restrictions.

For example, [in our stretching program](#) there are sample routines for people that are stuck at a desk all day at work and want to counteract that posture and improve their hip and back flexibility, and for runners that need some extra work to keep their running technique perfect and efficient.

Those are just a couple of examples of the various plans that are made based on an individual's personal situation.

The gains from this plan build up from session to session and that's a matter of consistent practice and giving your body a chance to adapt to those gains.

## Retaining Your Flexibility Once You Have It

You may have experienced the phenomenon of improved range of motion at the end of one workout, only to have it nearly disappear the next time you work on your stretching.

It doesn't do you any good to make a change only to lose ground again.

This certainly won't get you where you want faster if you are getting pushed backwards again and again.

This may happen to people because of the body's natural tendency to revert to what it perceives as the normal condition. Our bodies are actually averse to big changes in short periods of time.

Homeostasis and the set point theory indicate that our bodies like the status quo.

And big swings away from your current condition can set off alarm bells. It's one of the reasons behind yo-yo weight changes where people lose or gain a bunch of weight only to revert back to their previous condition again.

A great way to prevent this from happening is getting your body accustomed to this new flexibility.

Actively explore your movement in and out of new ranges of motion and your body will interpret this as a "new normal."

This is more than just contracting your muscles in that stretched position.

You should take some time to concentrate and go slowly in and out of the new positions. Doing this in a variety of ways and really [exploring your movement](#) will reinforce your flexibility improvements and help you keep the gains in your range of motion.

## To Get Flexible, You Have to Get Started

It can be difficult to know where to start with flexibility training. There's a tremendous amount of information out there, and much of it is conflicting. "*Do this, don't do that,*" it's enough to stop you before you even begin.

Well, the four steps outlined above will help you get to where you want to go.

### HERE'S A QUICK REVIEW:

1. Determine your real flexibility needs
2. Figure out where you're most stiff
3. Be patient and consistent with your flexibility work
4. Stick to a stretching plan (don't try to wing it)

**One that that won't work is doing nothing.**

You simply can't expect to improve your flexibility by sitting around wishing you could do a split.

You have to get started if you want to get results.

# OUTRODUCTION

This flexibility resource guide was designed to give you a foundational understanding of flexibility - why it's important, what it really is, and some ideas on how to implement flexibility training into your life.

Obviously, there's a lot we haven't covered in this guide, but these basics will serve you well when you're ready to move on to a more complete program.

And when you are ready to take your flexibility to the next level, [Focused Flexibility](#), our most popular program, is ready and waiting for you.



Thank you. We hope to see you soon!

### **The GMB Team**

Ryan, Jarlo, Andy, Amber, Rachel, and Clayton