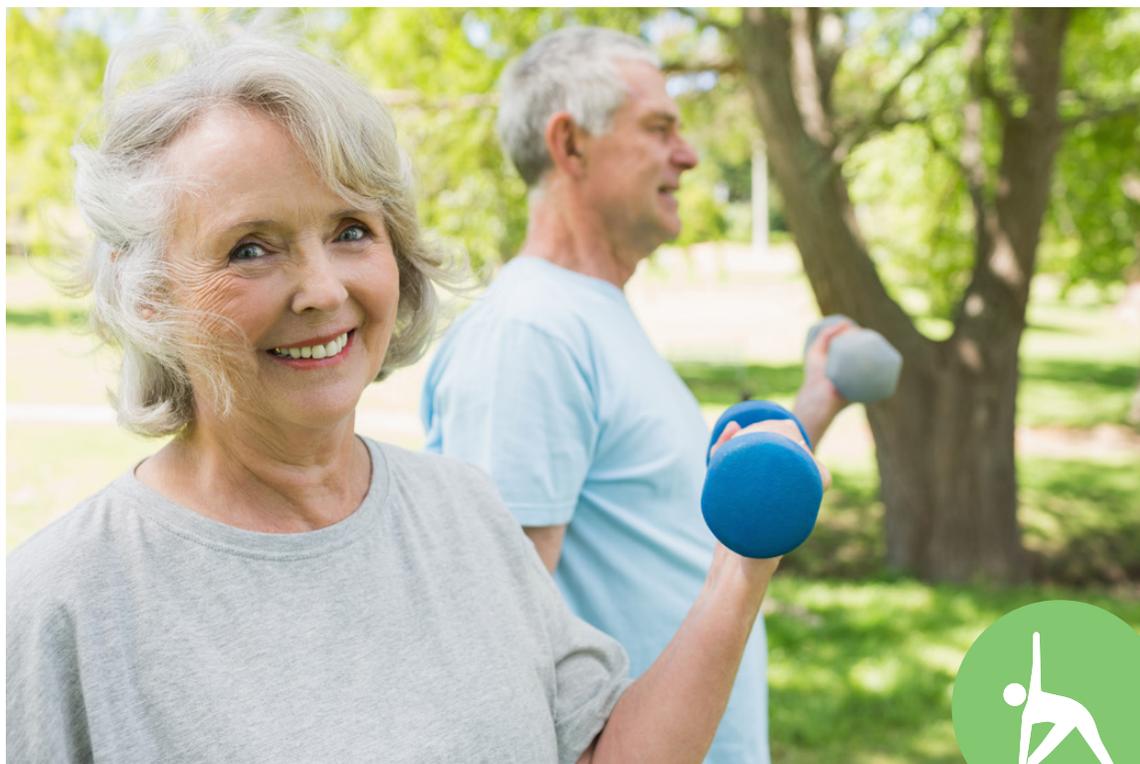


# HABIT 7: STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY

As with strength training, proper technique with stretching is key.



**Goal:** Try to incorporate an aspect of strength and/or flexibility to several workouts each week.

Physical activity aids in disease prevention and helps achieve optimal health. Flexibility and strength in particular aid in improving wellness, performance, preventing injury, and achieving personal fitness goals.

**Flexibility (Mobility):**

Flexibility varies from person to person and has a fundamental role of fitness that may help decrease the risk of injuries, release pain associated with musculoskeletal stiffness, and improve sport-specific performance. Flexibility can include both traditional stretching movements to lengthen short, tight muscles as well as full body mobility exercises that help move limbs through their full range of motion, eliminating restrictions and improving the ability to attain optimal positioning during movements. Mobility exercises can include foam rolling and mobility drills. Adequate range of motion around a joint is vital before one begins to strength train and load the joint. By having such flexibility, our muscles work effectively through their entire range and can help prevent cumulative over-load injuries.

**Proper technique:** As with strength training, proper technique with stretching is key. [Here is a guide](#) for some basic stretches. Also, check [here](#) for more stretching basics. If you are interested in foam rolling, check out the DAHLC's [instructional foam rolling video](#).

**Warm up:** A wise time to stretch is after blood flow has warmed up the muscle tissue. Avoid stretching a “cold” (non-warmed up) muscle.

**Hold the stretch:** Move through the stretch until you feel some tension—remember to back off if the stretch becomes painful. Hold a stretch 20-30

seconds, and, in some problem areas, repeat the stretch several times. Try using a watch to help with timing.

**Explore the options:** “Static” stretching is helpful for optimizing motion about a joint and correcting differences in flexibility side to side. Consider “dynamic” stretching also, which basically involves movement patterns similar to the activity you will be participating in at slow speed initially and progressing gradually to the speeds you will be using during the activity.

**Maximize your time:** Be creative to increase your mobility – stretch at your desk, take a walking meeting or utilize the stairs. Try a foam roller, tennis ball, or therastick to work tight muscles.

**Strength (Stability):**

We all lose up to 8 percent of our lean muscle mass per decade after around age 30. Fortunately, this can be counteracted by introducing regular strength training. Here are a few tips as you start or continue to build strength and stability.

**Protection:** Strength training helps protect joints and [reduce the pain of arthritis](#). In other words, the best “brace” you can give yourself is via the “natural brace” of your muscles.

**Explore the options:** You can use a variety of types of “resistance” to improve strength: Your own body weight, free weights, resistance bands, machines, and even water. Watch these [online videos](#) for options.

**Technique is key:** Using poor technique increases risk for injury, so it’s crucial to have the best technique for each exercise. Follow the proper “do’s and don’ts” to avoid common mistakes.

**Activate:** Whenever you can, squeeze the shoulder blades together, tighten the abdominal and gluteal muscles, power walk, perform calf raises, take the stairs, and always focus on form.