The Importance of Stretching

Any good workout starts with a dynamic warm up, continues into a workout, followed by a cool down and a stretch. But too often people miss the stretching part of a workout. There workout is done, now they need to race home, have a shower and get on with the day. I too have been guilty of doing this in the past. But I learnt very quickly that stretching at the end of a workout is so important. Here's why…

Strength and fitness are important elements in life, but flexibility is too. Being flexible helps with injury prevention and mobility in everyday life. We need our muscles to be flexible to allow full range of motion through our joints. If your muscles are tight, they pull on our joints and restrict range of motion, which can easily result in injury, joint pain or muscle damage. Regular stretching helps keep the muscles long and supple, and able to take the strain of exercise and actually helps improve muscular function.

Stretching can also help relieve pain and tension. Constant muscle tensions can cause a lot of discomfort in the body. But stretching can help elongate those muscles, releasing some of that tension and alleviating some of the discomfort. Stretching out the muscles also improves blood flow and circulation, which can aid in muscle recovery. No, it is not the magic elixir to cure DOMS (delayed onset muscle soreness – the pain you feel in your muscles the day after a workout), but it can aid in blood flow to the muscle, aid in releasing tension in the muscle, and therefore aid in its recovery. But remember not to over stretch, especially sore muscles. Light stretching is all it needs.

Stretching at the end of a workout is the best time to do it, and should never be skipped, but it is also good to do daily. Doing some light stretches of main muscle groups each evening before bed can improve flexibility significantly. It is a great habit to get in to and will improve your exercise ability, assist in keeping you pain and injury free, and is a fantastic way to wind down before bed. Just remember that it is always best to stretch when the muscles are warm, so a light walk or something to get the blood flowing first is always a good idea.