Ask Joe Weider: Stretch, don't tear

by Joe_Weider

Tip of the Week: Stretching isn't supposed to hurt.

Over the years, I've seen any number of bodybuilders grimacing in pain as they stretch out before, during and after workouts. While stretching isn't always easy, especially if you're doing it right, it should never cause you intense pain.

The reasons for stretching are many: increased flexibility, improved range of motion, increased blood flow into muscles and even relief of the stress associated with tight muscles. However, you must observe caution when stretching. Although it doesn't carry the same risks as weight-bearing exercise, there are risks nonetheless.

I recommend stretching after a brief warm-up. Stretching cold muscles puts them at risk for injury. Think of your muscles as organic rubber bands. If you put a rubber band in the freezer for an hour and then try to stretch it, it won't go far before it snaps. Likewise, you'll have an easier and safer time of it stretching warm muscles.

Also, avoid ballistic or bounce stretches for the same reason. Bouncing into a stretch puts you at risk of muscle and tendon tears, which will have the opposite effect of stretching.

Q: Joe, I have a complaint about fitness magazines (yes, even yours) and all those TV commercials for home gym equipment and diet pills and the like. They all feature people with perfect bodies â€” bodies I know are beyond my reach. I was born to big-boned parents, and no matter how I try, I can't get down to a size 4. I'm a size 8, which makes me the smallest woman in my extended family. I guess this isn't so much a question as a comment. Thanks for reading it!

Joe: I hear your frustration, and I do understand your point of view. It's true that I would always use the fittest men and women for the covers of my magazines as well as for the inside stories. So do most of the fitness companies when advertising their products. It does make sense, doesn't it? We are promoting an ideal, as represented by these very fit people.

Of course, no one should judge themselves by the standards set by others. Each of us has our own set of abilities and limitations, and only we know how much we're capable of achieving.

That being said, I've always considered our models to be living representatives of goals. In my bodybuilding magazines, we would feature images of men like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Franco Columbu not to make readers feel they had so far to go, but to give them goals to reach. Whether or not they ever reached them wasn't nearly so important as whether they tried.

So I say to you, try not to become antagonized by the images of fit models you encounter. Rather, let them inspire you to be the best you can be.

Q: Do you have any thoughts on cross fit training or the "300" workout? It seems that kettlebells, bands and unusual lifts with names like the Turkish Getup have overtaken traditional weight training in terms of popularity.

Joe: Honestly, I don't know much about all of these new systems of training other than that they're all variations on things we were doing decades ago.

When I first started lifting, kettlebells were still making their first go-round. While they were good for odd lifts, the advent of dumbbells made them obsolete. In fact, kettlebells all but disappeared in the United States until the last 10 years, when they've resurfaced as a "new" training tool.

While we never used bands back in the old days, we did perform various plyometric exercises and unconventional lifts, such as the two-hand anyhow, and worked with Indian clubs. All of these, in addition to the more traditional lifts, created a great combination of strength, balance and coordination.

So I am in support of trying a variety of techniques, so long as the end result is a stronger, fitter, better-built you!

Joe Weider is acclaimed as "the father of modern bodybuilding" and the founder of the world's leading fitness magazines, including Shape, Muscle and Fitness, Men's Fitness, Fit Pregnancy, Hers, Golf for Seniors and others published worldwide in over 20 languages.

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