Is it okay to stretch when I am still sore? [1]

Dear Alice,

I have recently started to stretch to start learning yoga and I have become sore in my muscles, and was wondering if I am sore the next day after stretching, is it ok to stretch the next day when I am still sore?

?Sorely in need of an answer

Answer

Dear Sorely in need of an answer,

Many of us become sore when we begin exercising. Common causes for the discomfort that results immediately or a day or two after exercise may include:

- Tiny tears in the muscle tissue and/or connective tissue surrounding the muscle
- Fluid retention surrounding the muscle tissue
- Muscle spasms
- Overstretching

You certainly don't want to cause more harm than good. Without an in-person evaluation, the exact reason behind your soreness cannot be determined. As your soreness cannot be safely assessed via the internet, specific recommendations cannot be made as to whether stretching would be appropriate under your current conditions. It’s safe to say some soreness may be due to the new way you are using some of the muscles, though if any action causes severe pain you should stop the activity and seek guidance from your health care provider. Allowing a day of rest between stretching and yoga activities can help your muscles recover and support your overall goals. If you have only minor muscle soreness, consider using static stretching.

Static stretching is a type of stretch that's recommended to alleviate muscle soreness. It involves holding a stretch for 2 minutes, resting for a minute, and then holding another 2-minute stretch. To do this, position your body so that the joint involved is stabilized, placing the muscle at its greatest possible length. For example, your knee needs to be straight, not bent, if you are stretching your hamstring muscles (located at the back of the upper leg). Whether you carry out the stretch in a standing position, sitting upright, or lying on your back depends on your flexibility and how the stretch feels to you. If you are going to stretch, always warm up beforehand? such as by walking for at least 5 minutes. (You can do this in place, if
you don’t feel like walking around the block.) Static stretching causes little to no muscle contraction, and certainly no pain. Avoid bouncing motions - they cause the muscle to contract, inflicting pain.

Since subtle changes in your body positioning can make a world of difference in the benefit you derive from a stretch, seeking professional assistance on stretching is a good idea. You can work with a knowledgeable Certified Personal Trainer or Physical Therapist. To find a certified personal trainer in your area, visit the American Council on Exercise web site [2]. Talk with your primary health care provider about getting a referral to a physical therapist.

Alice!
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