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 okay to stretch the next day when I am still sore?

— Sorely in need of an answer

Answer

Dear Sorely in need of an answer,

With the start of any new physical activity regimen, there’s a chance of becoming sore. Before making a decision about whether or not to continue stretching, it’s a good idea to assess your pain levels. If what you’re experiencing is either a mild burning-like sensation while you’re stretching or a generalized ache in the hours or days following the activity, it might be okay to keep going, in moderation. If you find that you’re feeling sharp pain, swelling, or bruising, among other symptoms, it may be good to give your body a break and if needed, getting it checked out.

Read on for more detail about assessing your pain levels and whether to continue stretching.

The sore or generalized achy feeling you get following physical activity is often referred to as delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS). It usually happens when you start a new physical activity regimen or increase the time or intensity of the activity. This results in microscopic damage to muscle fibers which causes the soreness. DOMS typically lasts three to five days with the first two days being more painful, and in most cases doesn’t require medical treatment. You might find some relief with rest, ice packs, over-the-counter painkillers, or a massage. That being said, you certainly don’t want to cause more harm than good. Allowing a day of rest between stretching and yoga activities can help your muscles recover and support your overall goals. If you only have minor muscle soreness, you could consider stretching or activating the muscles that aren’t sore.

If, however, you’re experiencing sharp pain that prevents you from moving, lasts more than a few days, or is coupled with bruising, nausea, vomiting, or fevers and chills, it might be time to stop the activity and talk with your health care provider. These symptoms may be a sign of an injury
that requires medical attention.

You may also find it helpful to reflect on your goals. Are you eager to see results from your physical activity? Do you find it to be an enjoyable activity? The answers to these questions may help you determine how and when you'd move forward with your activity, as well as help you figure out when you'd seek additional support so you can safely achieve your goals.

As your body recovers from the soreness, consider checking on your form. Working with a certified personal trainer or physical therapist may be able to help you with proper stretching techniques that maximize the benefits and minimize the risk of injury.

Good luck!

Alice!

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