

### Episode 14

# Why Stretching Matters - Part One

Hi, I'm Rosie Bank and I'll be your host on this episode of Health Matters Podcast. This is the first episode of this New Year. Today is January 2, 2018. I am excited and optimistic about our time together over the next twelve months, and beyond. For me, staying well is an ever-unfolding process. It is by far not a singular event.

Our topic for this episode is why stretching matters. I promise to enlighten you, if you are open to hearing this, how and why stretching can be a big part of your wellness plan. I chose this topic on purpose as it is among the most powerful for you if you intend to be your best radiant self in this year and in years to come. In terms of my own practices, my commitment to yoga and stretching has impacted my life as much as anything else I have learned and stayed committed to over the years.

My intention for this episode is to lead you to discover the joys of stretching for yourself. Also, to lend you a helping hand if you find yourself stuck behind reasons or excuses why you think you don't have time or aren't able to stretch. My intent is to help you condition your mind to begin to take care of your body in this way. And last, to make sure that you have a plan to be able to reliably count on stretching to help you achieve benefits that are personal to you. I have felt and said often that stretching is as close to the fountain of youth as anything you can do to live with more abundant good health in your body.

Be sure to go to [www.RosieBank.com/14download](http://www.RosieBank.com/14download) for your free download. This is where I load up the goodies for you to be able to stay with and deepen your relationship with stretching. I have some illustrations of some simple stretches, plus a ten-part personal check list to help you

get on and stay on track. And for anyone listening to this podcast, I will be glad to send you a copy of my book, *Bodies, Health and Consciousness* if you choose to do a mini-series with me of Health Coaching. This was my second book. The sub-title is *A Guide to Living More Successfully in Your Body Through Rolfing and Yoga*. All of these links and further instructions will be in your download at [www.RosieBank.com/14download](http://www.RosieBank.com/14download). Don't worry if you are driving now or if you are without a way to take notes. I'll take care of that for you in the download.

Briefly, let me tell you when and how stretching came into my life. I learned yoga at the tender age of nineteen and I have been practicing ever since. I don't like yoga. I *love* yoga. I would be thrilled for you to be able to say the same thing for yourself someday. We will do our best to get you there. I know many people who stretch dutifully. They go through the motions because they know that they should and that it is good for them. You may borrow from my decades-long experience when I encourage you to get into stretching until you fall in love with how good you can feel as a result. And even if your response is less effervescent than mine, know that it still okay to stretch dutifully, knowing that it is good for you.

Shortly after I discovered yoga, I began to train extensively. I was a member of the Kundalini yoga organization and traveled throughout the United States and Mexico, studying, training, learning to teach, and living in two different ashrams. One was in Boulder, Colorado and one was in Mexico City. In fact, I taught my very first class in Spanish. Ashrams are spiritual communities. Back then I was a college student. No kids, no mortgage, no husband, and few responsibilities. I was able to practice and meditate for three to four hours every day. I vividly recall, decades later, realizing that the nature of my practice gradually changed as the demands in my life made those long practices a thing of the past. However, *and this is an important heads up for you*, moving to a thirty to sixty minute practice most days out of the week feels just as

beneficial to me now as the longer practice felt when I was in my twenties. The reason this is useful for you is because you can find that ten minutes here, and fifteen minutes there can add up to something quite beneficial. The point is to find a way to allow yoga and stretching to make sense in your life. There is no one size fits all. I make a little pun when I say that it is important to be flexible with your stretching schedule.

When I came out to California in 1975, I began training at the Iyengar Yoga Institute, where I eventually received my teacher certification. I enjoyed two extensive teacher training trips, one to Pune, India, and one to Florence, Italy, plus countless opportunities for teaching, training, and practicing over the next four decades. I have relied on yoga to help me through three orthopedic sports-related surgeries, several personal set-backs, and frankly, life in general. This, coupled with meditation, has been a constant in my life for now forty-five years.

If you are just starting out, please do not make the error of comparing yourself to me. That would be unfair to you, and I would not want you to disqualify yourself from the life-altering benefits of yoga and stretching simply because you are new. On the contrary, there is no age that makes you too old to get started. One of my favorite quotes is that it is never too early to get started and it is always too late to wait. In fact, if you are new to stretching, you may have the most to gain. Let's jump in.

This episode will be in three parts and will continue over two separate recordings. On this episode I will discuss with you the benefits of stretching. On podcast number fifteen, titled Why Stretching Matters, Part Two, I will share my thoughts on how to prepare yourself to incorporate stretching into your life on a regular basis with some recommendations for specific stretches. Also, on number fifteen, let's talk about a more advanced approach, if you are ambitious and want to get more involved and perhaps take on a more challenging practice.

I'd like to clarify my use of the words yoga and stretching. Hatha yoga is the style of yoga that involves physical poses or postures, which are also called *asanas*. They have names in English and Sanskrit and are supported by ancient wisdom and science. It is common in Hatha yoga to find exacting formulations and precise positions. Although there are a variety of schools of Hatha yoga, they all involve these physical poses. The poses help our bodies become more open, stronger, more flexible, and more balanced. Please look for these words in your download. Open. Stronger. Flexible. Balanced. Don't these describe ways you would like to be in your body? This is what I mean when I describe yoga as having far-reaching benefits into our bodies, as well as our lives.

Stretching is any exercise in which we elongate our muscles. Leaning forward in a bend is a stretch to the muscles of your neck, back, and legs. Lying on the floor and rolling on our lower backs with our knees to our chest is stretching. The difference between stretching and yoga may not be in the benefit, and in some cases they overlap. You can think of yoga as perhaps being somewhat more formal. There is no need to call what you do yoga. Finding ways to stretch your body to give you pleasant feelings of relief, and a sense of relaxation is all that is necessary. Yoga teachers are usually trained to encourage you to breathe as a way to intensify your ability to release tension and experience relaxation. You can do this when you stretch as well.

The benefits of stretching could fill a book. In your free download ([www.RosieBank.com/14](http://www.RosieBank.com/14)) I will suggest some other resources for you to deepen your knowledge. But please know that nothing will match or beat your very own personal experience and, as I love to say, getting the stretching in your own body. Let's get through this so we can get you opening your body on your stretching mat as soon as possible.

- 1. Stretching will help you feel more comfortable in your body.** My husband and I were at a New Year's Eve party recently and I saw a woman punching her fist into her lower back. Even her face revealed that she was in pain or at least discomfort. I thought to myself, oh, she could stretch that out and feel so much better. And you can apply this to yourself. We are meant to move around. We are meant to enjoy movement in our bodies. I have included in your download a video of movement to show you how beautiful it can be when our bodies move fluidly. I remember a yoga student who phoned me after a session in which we addressed her lower back pain. She told me that she felt vastly better after the private lesson. She said, "I still feel a little soreness, but I feel so much better because now I can move!" Her comment has stayed with me for many years because I felt it was so telling. Whether you are carrying in groceries in from your car, sitting in an airplane seat, or going for a bike ride, having stretched your body will always help you feel more comfortable. Comfortable translates to more relaxed. More about that in a moment.
- 2. Stretching will help you resolve pain and strain in your body.** It is such a drag to walk around feeling stiff and in pain. Some of the most common forms of pain are in the neck, back, head, and shoulders. Considering that pain can be caused from acute or chronic contractions in your muscles, lengthening your muscles can bring relief. When we talk about how you can get started to stretch, I will remind you to be on the lookout for a completely sublime experience of feeling your muscles elongate. I have easily done ten thousand forward bends in my life, even as recently as this morning. To this day, feeling my back, legs, shoulders and arms "give" is lovely. If your body parts feel stiff and painful, even fifteen minutes of stretching can give you relief. Whether you are going for

a walk with a friend, standing in front of clients or co-workers, or helping your kids with their homework, any and all experiences are simply better when you are not hurting and your body feels good. You can consider this a global recommendation regarding stretching.

One more side-benefit to getting relief from pain and stiffness is your ability to feel in control of your body. Instead of feeling stuck with shoulder pain, or trapped with a sore lower back, stretching your body can help you feel empowered to manage this on your own. This is powerful and magical. And the more times you practice this, the more profound this becomes. Let's say that during thirty minutes of stretching, you can feel the knot behind your shoulder blades soften. Being present for this change in your body is what stretching is all about. Relaxing between your shoulder blades does not happen on its own. It happens because you, occupant of your uniquely beautiful body, let go on purpose and consciously. You can feel yourself release the tension and allow relaxation to seep into this part of your body. The benefit I am referring to means that later, let's say you are sitting at your desk, if you feel that familiar discomfort between your shoulder blades (or wherever you have been prone to store tension in your body), you can recreate letting go because you learned how to do this when you were stretching your body. This, my friends, is among the most spectacular benefits that you can enjoy. My hope for you is that you will practice until you have your own experience of this, and then continue to deepen your connection with your body even more.

3. **Stretching will give you a sense of embodiment.** I love this word and use it frequently. Let me encourage you to add *embodiment* and *embodied* to your vocabulary. The only definitions I could find online were rather technical and scientific. However, in this case,

I am using this word to describe a state in which you come alive. You feel yourself. You have said hello to your body and you know where you are in space. You can sense your legs. You can feel your back resting against your seat. You can relax your hamstrings and no longer feel pain behind your legs after you drive because you felt where your hamstrings are in your morning stretch. You can feel your breath swirling around in your body because you took a few minutes last evening to experience this on purpose. You are connected with your body.

Now I wonder if you are wondering why this would be beneficial. Are you wondering this? If you are, let me explain this to you simply. Yoga will help you get out of your head. If you are one of those people who is always thinking, always processing something, and who rarely has a quiet moment in the space between your ears, yoga can help you dial this back. There is more to life than overthinking everything. There is a time and a place when we need to be firing off thoughts, decisions, and a variety of cognitive processes. But not constantly. Not without a break. Feeling your body, having a sense that you are alive and aware not just mentally, but also energetically, in your body, is like an enhancement, or an upgrade. Your life and your experience are not limited to your thoughts. In my book titled [Health Matters](#), I devote an entire chapter to this topic. The chapter is called “Take Your Body with You” and it addresses this notion that being alive in and aware of your body makes life richer and sweeter. I encourage you to experience this for yourself in order to know what I am describing. Yoga stretches will help you to do this.

4. **Stretching will help you relax, unwind, and experience more harmony.** I am aware that stress management and stress relief are extremely familiar topics for stressed out

individuals. I also realize that for people who are stressed out, they think about and talk about “wanting less stress.” To me, this is faulty thinking because stress is still in the equation. If you are not new to the Health Matters Podcast, you have heard me mention this in a variety of contexts. What is even better than having less stress, is experiencing more relaxation, more peace, and more harmony.

Stretching is like a holiday gift wrapped in a beautiful ribbon. Increasing the degree to which you feel at peace in your body informs everything you do. I realize that you might not know this to be a fact yet. But I believe that you can lead yourself to have your very own personal a-ha moments with this one. As an example, think of a situation in which you have found yourself in the past feeling tense, impatient, irritable, or anxious. How stretching can help is two-fold. First, you can literally, with practice and over time, release the built-up tension in your body in the form of lengthening your muscles and allowing the strain to seep out as you transform to a more relaxed state. That means that after cursing at your fellow drivers and battling with road rage, stretching your body will help you feel calmer. Stretching is literally a release valve to stored tension in your body. This works in reverse as well. Let’s say you stretch your muscles for twenty minutes in the morning before you even get in your car. When you do this, you are much more likely to enjoy the buffer you have created between you and being at the effect of how other drivers behave on the road. Your body supports you to have a more harmonious experience in your environment, rather than joining you in battle.

What I am describing is not a quickie thing, or something you can benefit from once, like a caffeine high that jolts you awake after you throw down a cup of coffee. Rather, I am

describing a different way for you to approach life and its myriad experiences. I will elaborate for you in my next example.

5. **Stretching will help you to be a more relaxed person.** I know this sounds like the fourth example above but I am going to make an adjustment for you here. I am referring to other people's experience of you. I can't say for sure because I might not know you personally, but I guess that you would prefer to be someone other than an uptight individual who is perceived by others as stiff and inflexible. Interacting with others after an unhurried session of breathing and relaxing your body will transform how you show up. Imagine standing in line at the post office next to someone who is fuming because she thinks the line is moving too slowly. Remember the last time you drove in the car with someone who is freaking out because of the traffic. Think of a time when you wanted to have a conversation with a co-worker, employer, or employee and the other person seemed like his head was about to explode.

Conversely, stretching can help you become the person around whom others have a positive experience. Right now I am talking about your energy. Your vibes. What it may seem like to someone else to be in your presence. I love hanging out with people who do yoga because I often experience them as being pleasant to be around, and that they radiate positive energy. If what I am describing is completely foreign to you, or if you are doubtful that this is really something, I suggest that you experiment on your own. You can even recruit someone with whom you live or work to give you before and after feedback. Frequently, after I have been doing yoga stretches and meditating, I can feel more open to my husband and more agreeable. I also feel nicer. There is an after-glow to stretching and breathing and it can feel good not only to you, but to the people around

you as well. In this way, you might feel as I do, that I am not the only benefactor of the time I spend stretching. Even my dogs like to be around me. We do upward and downward dog together every morning.

6. **Stretching is extremely good for your health.** I looked on the Mayo Clinic website knowing that there would be an endorsement for stretching from this highly credible medical establishment. And indeed there was. I have included in your free download a little slide show from Mayo Clinic with some simple yet [effective stretches](#) you can do on your own. Here is why and how stretching is so beneficial.

- Your blood vessels live in your muscle tissue, among other places in your body. When your muscles are chronically tight and constricted, this can translate to restrictions in your entire cardiovascular system. This includes your heart, arteries, and veins. It is not a pretty picture, but you can imagine how an extremely tense and uptight person would be more at risk for a heart attack. Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is also correlated with restrictions in your muscles. As a result, elongating your muscles can help promote cardiovascular health and reduce your risk to cardiovascular disease.

I love this quote by Dean Ornish. “When the body and mind are deeply relaxed, healing can occur. Most people don’t even recognize how tense they are until they experience deep relaxation. Deep relaxation can restore the body and mind more deeply than sleep because when we practice deep, progressive relaxation, we are ‘consciously letting go.’”

I like his stretching program a lot. I will include this in your free download.

- Yoga and stretching help you relax. By calming yourself down, you can experience more energy in a peaceful kind of way. This can be quite soothing to your emotions and even beneficial to your psychological state. Challenges with anxiety, depression, loneliness, and cravings can be quelled by going into a relaxed state in your body. There have been countless times that I used yoga stretches as a tool to help myself regain composure after feeling particularly upset. This shift of your state can become transformational. Practicing this over time will invariably deepen your experience and create even more of a contrast.
- In addition to the mental benefits, according to the [American Osteopathic Association](#), yoga stretches can even help with metabolism and weight loss. I'll include this entire list in your free download at [www.RosieBank.com/14](http://www.RosieBank.com/14). The weight loss and metabolism can come as a result of two ways that yoga and stretching help. Stretching can be pleasantly vigorous, as in physical exercise. You can burn calories and get pleasantly sweaty from a hearty stretching workout. This is particularly true when you incorporate some strengthening exercises into your practice. Sun salutations, forearm balances, standing poses, and backbends are examples of strength-based exercises.  
  
Plus, as you become calmer, you may notice a reduction in cravings and using food improperly. I don't think it can be said that yoga or stretching cures anxiety, substance abuse, or depression. However, with an improvement in your mental state and an increase to the energy flowing in your body, it can be said that yoga helps. Feeling better naturally is clinically significant. If you find yourself with a brighter outlook and far less prone to feelings of anxiety, this may inspire you to

continue practicing. The take-away here is that over time, you will enjoy even more benefit.

7. The last health benefit I would love to discuss is about your posture and aging. I am fiercely passionate on this topic and want to encourage you to look ahead. How do you want your body to look and feel as you age? If your muscles never get a good stretch, the downward pull will invariably manifest as deeper issues as you age. Gravity will prevail and you could end up sorry that you did not move your body more. Look around you. If you know people in their fifties, sixties, seventies and beyond, one thing that differentiates them is the degree to which their bodies are supple and upright. If you ask me, I will gladly tell you how important I believe it is to allow my body to remain supple and strong and never stop the practices that help me feel this way. Given the fact that we can make a huge difference by keeping our muscles limber, and the fact that practicing balancing exercises through yoga stretches will impact how we age, who wouldn't want these results?

Remember that great word, embodiment? This is an embodied approach to issues that may have felt psychological and even medical. In Sanskrit yoga means *union*. The parts of us are all connected. Finally, this is what we learn and how yoga stretches can help us transform our lives.

Thank you for going on this journey with me. I know you can hear and perhaps feel in my voice my passion for this way of living more healthfully in our bodies. I am recording this podcast and the follow up one back to back so that you can move right into learning how to incorporate yoga into what might already seem like a too-busy life. I may never meet you. And yet, still, I passionately hope you will give yourself this gift. It is worth it to figure this out and get moving

and stretching. This will become one of the most sacred ways for you to love your body and get your body to love you back.

This is Rosie Bank. Founder of Health Matters Coaching. I love yoga, I love that you are open to doing this amazing work to help yourself feel and move better, and I love that we all care to make the world a better place by making our health a priority. Meet me and join us at [www.Facebook.com/GetYourBodyToLoveYouBack](http://www.Facebook.com/GetYourBodyToLoveYouBack) where you will find like-minded people and lots of great resources. Help me get to know you and let me know what you would like for me to write and speak about.

In closing, let me remind you that your health matters. Your body matters. And so do you.

Namasté