

### Episode 15

# Why Stretching Matters, Part Two

Hi, I'm Rosie Bank and I'll be your host on this episode of Health Matters Podcast. Hopefully you just listened to the first part of this episode, which was Why Stretching Matters Part One. If you have not, and if you are new to stretching and doing yoga, I suggest that you listen to both of these in order as they are designed as a pair. I recommend the previous episode for you to listen to prior to this one. Go to [www.RosieBank.com/14](http://www.RosieBank.com/14) to access it.

As I mentioned in Part One, my intention is to help you condition your mind to be willing to take on these suggestions and do something wonderful for your body. It is no accident that I chose this topic to launch Health Matters Podcast for 2018.

Assuming that you now understand the benefits of doing yoga stretches let's get you set up to begin to incorporate this into what may be an already busy life. Does your life feel too busy at times? If so, this is for you. In fact, and perhaps a bit paradoxically, taking some time out to breathe, relax, and stretch your body can give you a sense of more time. Why? Because we stretch in an unhurried manner, doing so can feel like it is among the most spacious segments of our entire day. This may be one of the few things you do during the day when you aren't rushing.

Here are eleven tips to get you started and on track. I'll prepare these for you in your free download at [www.RosieBank.com/15download](http://www.RosieBank.com/15download). I will also show you some core stretches that you can use to get started and enjoy your benefits fairly quickly. I hope you enjoy the video I prepared for you on your free download as well.

1. **Being stiff is a reason to stretch, not a reason to avoid it.** I hear from people all the time that they “can’t do yoga or stretch” because their bodies are too stiff. Speaking with you now emphatically, if you resonate with this, know that you have the most to gain. How do you know you are stiff? Do your joints ache? Do your feet hurt when you get out of bed in the morning? Is there a burning sensation in your shoulders when you sit at your computer? What is the feedback that your body gives you? Your body is relaying information to you through your muscles, and this is not a fixed state. It is in fact precisely this feedback that is a call for movement. Our dogs stretch every morning and throughout the day. If you take one thing away from this segment it is this: Feeling stiff is a call for movement. When your bladder is full, this is a call to go pee. When your stomach is empty, this is a call to eat. When your eyes are tired, it is a call to go to sleep. When your muscles feel tight, this is a call to stretch and move. I hope you are nodding your head in agreement and I hope that if this is you, that you feel an upsurge in motivation.

One more critical note about stretching if your body feels stiff is to recognize that it is not always enjoyable or pleasurable to stretch chronically or acutely stiff muscles. I often describe stretching as sublime, or magical, and it often feels that way. However, from my own experience, I assure you that if your body hurts or if it is incredible uncomfortable you are not necessarily doing anything wrong. The right thing to do is to back off a little, as you control the intensity of the stretch. Your breath is an extremely powerful tool to help you let go under the demands of this intense stretch. Muscles are made up of elastic tissue. Assuming you are indeed stretching your muscles, you are probably doing your body good. Any experience of intense pain or extreme discomfort is a sign to back off.

Pain can be gain when you are doing yoga stretches. But you should never be in so much discomfort that you are unable to take deep breaths. Experience will teach you a lot. Getting familiar with the restrictions in your body is a big part of what your yoga stretches can offer you. And of course, going beyond these limitations makes your practice worthwhile.

2. **Your equipment and your space.** It makes a huge difference to create some space where you live or work to stretch your body. If you had to move furniture or crawl over boxes every time you wanted to spend fifteen minutes to nurture your body in this way, you might experience too much resistance to making the time. You don't need an entire yoga studio. In fact, the space that a regular yoga mat takes up is plenty for most things you want to do. I believe it is worth it to invest in a yoga mat. Besides being your special place to do yoga stretches, it is also motivating. I love all of my sports gear, including my yoga mat and it makes me feel very happy when I use them. Although you will find blocks, blankets, ropes, and hanging apparatus, you ought to be fine with just a mat and perhaps a blanket if you want to stay warm and do some relaxation when you are done.

Loose and comfortable clothing are a must. Restrictive pants, belts, shoes, and zippers can get in your way. If you are warm enough bare feet work best. Since feeling the ground under you is part of the benefit, it makes sense that shoes normally ought to be off to the side. Obviously if you are outside and the grass is wet and there is no other place to stretch, you would not expect to take off your shoes.

It is also recommended that you have little or no food in your stomach when you stretch. A small meal prior to your yoga stretching session is fine. But you would be uncomfortable, distracted, and limited if you tried to stretch with an overly full belly.

3. **There is no right or wrong time to stretch.** The perfect time to stretch or do yoga is when you feel like it. I might make you laugh as I make an argument for stretching when you wake up, in the late morning, after lunch or in the afternoon, before your evening meal, or before you go to bed. What is wonderful about stretching first thing is that it is an invigorating way to get your day started. I think of this as allowing energy and flexibility to enter my body first thing, like using a compass to set my direction. Stretching late morning is great because it is like taking an energy break. It is similar to the recommendation to get up out of your chair after sitting for a couple of hours. It's better than a snack or a cup of coffee which you might need to overcome a morning slump of energy. A couple of hours after lunch is a lovely time to stretch as it breaks up your afternoon. I always feel more awake and alive and this often enables me to get back to my desk for a second wind of creativity and focus. I love doing yoga before dinner as it is a neat way to wrap up my work day and put closure to my tasks and prepare myself for the evening ahead. And last, doing some yoga stretches before you go to bed is a heavenly way to undo any stress or strain you may have incurred in your body throughout the day. I think of this last one like refreshing my body and mind for a peaceful and comfortable night's sleep. My husband jokes with me because whenever I make time for doing yoga stretches I tell him this is my favorite time to do this. I utilize all of these different options, depending on how my day is going.
4. **You can benefit by having a regular time to stretch.** Yes, of course, I hear the contradiction to the previous segment. However, both are true. If you follow my suggestion in number two above, then you are free to stretch when you feel like making the time without constraints. That is a good approach. In addition, there is tremendous

benefit by having a predictable time to do yoga stretches because this will help you incorporate some regularity to your practice. In fact, a fluid approach where you embrace both perspectives will help you in the long-run. Currently, my preferred time to do my yoga practice is in the morning. I have a routine of waking up, meditating, doing my yoga stretches, walking the dog, and then having breakfast with my husband. And as much as I love this and it works for me, on some days I simply feel like changing it up. I make yoga dates with myself and I look forward to that time when I can unwind, get off the grid, and hang out in my body. The main thing for you to be aware of is that whenever you choose to stretch your body, it will be a turning point for you in your day. It is pivotal in terms of your ability to feel embodied, connected to your essence, and enjoying more energy plus an expanded breath. There is no wrong time to give yourself this gift. I do suggest that at least you have a preferred practice time, like I said, to increase the chances that you will be consistent.

5. **Consider taking a class and working with a teacher.** There are excellent books and videos on how to do yoga. I will include a list in your free download at [www.RosieBank.com/15download](http://www.RosieBank.com/15download). But here comes a big but. A book will not correct your postural mistakes. A book will not put its hand on your back during a forward bend to help you elongate your spine. Watching a video will not point out that your shoulders are hunched in a posture designed to stretch your legs. Only a trained instructor will be able to guide you to release and let go in ways that are personal to you.

Yoga teachers have vastly different styles. I recently latched on to a yoga teacher in my community because I felt that he really knew the fine points of mastering the poses. In fact, over the last couple of years that I worked with him, I overcame temporary

challenges with my right knee and the left side of my neck. He guided me to adjust the stretches to accommodate these injuries and the results were exquisite. I suspect I could have done this in my own practice, but working with Tony definitely helped move things in the positive direction. You may need to shop around. If you do not like a teacher's style, keep looking. In the long run, it is well worth it to connect with someone who inspires you and who you feel is really teaching you yoga.

A word about being adjusted by a teacher. Like I mentioned, I have done over ten thousand dog poses since the early 1970's. And yet each time a skilled instructor places his or hands on my back helping me lift out of my shoulders and elongate my legs feels terrific. A dog pose, as an example, requires strength and considerable flexibility. What an instructor can do is use his or her body weight as a force external to my own body, hence the lift. We call this being adjusted. It is one of the more enjoyable aspects of taking a class.

And last, on this segment, if for whatever reason, you are unwilling or unable to get to a class, using videos and reading books count for a lot and I encourage you to find ones that you can work with and that help you get noticeable results.

6. **Have your own routine.** When I work with my coaching clients, I typically ask them if they would know what to do if they were to dedicate, say, fifteen minutes to stretching their bodies. This will be among your greatest tools and assets to get the most benefit from doing yoga stretches. An example of a simple routine you can learn to do at home might be a few sun salutations, a dog pose with variations, a tree pose, a seated twist, a gentle back bend, and another twist while lying on your back. In this simple sequence we have stretching, strengthening, balancing, and of course, relaxation. Some people stick

with the same routine year after year because it works for them. Later, when I discuss more advanced practices I will show you how to take yourself to the next level. The point of number five is that it will be enormously beneficial to you to be able to put at least fifteen minutes together and feel like you can really get some value stretching on your own.

- 7. Do not compare yourself to others.** If you are new to doing yoga stretches, the only thing you can expect is that you will be a beginner. How could this be any other way? You would not expect yourself to be a violin virtuoso, or a master gardener, or a gourmet chef at your first attempt at any of these. Right? Getting the right mindset about beginning to do yoga stretches will help you over the initial hurdle. George Leonard wrote *Mastery*, a book that I loved and recommend. On the subject, he said, “Perhaps we’ll never know how far the path can go, how much a human being can truly achieve, until we realize that the ultimate reward is not a gold medal but the path itself.” Being with where you are in your own development will help you advance more than if you judged yourself for not being far enough along. This is the path of yoga.
- 8. Progress is personal to you.** Among the most beautiful aspects of doing yoga stretches is that the benefits you receive are completely unique to your body. Let’s say that someone is wrapping her leg behind her head. Obviously this requires extreme flexibility. When this practitioner is working with her muscles, she is at the edge of her body’s ability to stretch. This pose, for *her*, works the same way as any pose works for *you* when you are at the edge of *your* body’s ability to stretch. She is not getting more benefit in her body than you are getting in your body. Working the edge is what yoga and stretching teach us. We go up to what feels like a limitation, we hang out with that with our breath,

with our conscious awareness, and we allow our bodies to give. And we open. We allow more space, more length, more comfort, and more energy. This benefit has nothing to do with how advanced your poses. In fact, if I had to pick, I would say the beginner is getting more benefit in a little more hip flexion and knee extension in a simpler pose than the advanced practitioner is getting with another inch of her leg wrapped around the back of her neck. But what I really feel is that there is no hierarchy suggesting that one is better than the other.

9. **Stretching is like thirty-one flavors.** By this I mean that you can have a wide variety of experiences when you stretch. Some days you will be so full of energy that you want to challenge yourself with all of the strengthening exercises you have learned. Some days you may feel an overwhelming need to unwind from too much stress and choose the quiet simple stretches to help you relax and quiet your mind. You may simply want to rest because you feel tired, or perhaps slightly unwell. In this case, you can select restorative poses, which are very gentle and undemanding. To get the most out of making time to do yoga stretches, you can explore these different approaches and select that which will give you what you need on that day.

Another flavor differentiation is where you are on the scale of strictly more physical to, let's call it more spiritual. There is no right or wrong. Lighting a candle, holding your hands folded over your heart, and meditating before or after you stretch will increase the degree to which your time touches your spirit. If this does not appeal to you or if you do not resonate with this, of course a strictly physical approach can be just as beneficial.

10. **Yoga helps you prepare for life.** I discussed this on the first part of this two-part podcast. It is ironic, insofar that we stretch for the experience of stretching. However, the

afterglow of stretching can positively impact so many aspects of our lives. As you connect more and more deeply with your practice, it behooves you to be aware of this afterglow. What does this even mean? Following your stretching time, it is best if you make a gradual transition into your busy life. Instead of jumping right back into the flames of stress, take a few moments to notice how your body feels, where your breath goes in your body, and the give to your muscles and joints when you move. If you must go right back into a meeting or a challenging environment, such as picking up a carload of noisy kids from school, do so with greater mindfulness for what I just mentioned. You will not be rendered dysfunctional if you remain aware of your body and your breathing. In fact, the more you practice being in this relaxing state, the more benefit you can derive from doing yoga stretches. Let these feelings be with you. Notice that you are more tolerant of the noisy kids, or more able to focus at the meeting at work without getting riled up. Perhaps you can sit in your office chair more comfortably. If you go into the kitchen to prepare a meal, notice that you are more able to relax your lower back and let your shoulders soften. I call this *yoga in motion*. This is among the most sacred benefits of your stretching practice. It is worth noticing.

11. **No time is too short.** Sure, thirty to sixty minutes of doing yoga stretches is wonderful and may be among the most enjoyable moments in your day. But what if you don't have that much time? What if you have ten minutes before your next meeting? What if you have five minutes before your client or family arrives? Take the time that you have. If you are out sight-seeing and your lower back feels sore, you can lean forward and hang in a forward bend and breathe for about a minute. No one cares, and I have done this in public countless times. When I am in a park and see the bars the kids hang on, I often put

my hands on the bar and let my weight lean back for a great back and leg stretch. Keep in mind that it takes approximately forty-five seconds to a minute for the bio-chemical event to occur in your muscles that transforms tension into relaxation. If you are going to stretch for a very short time, it is better to do fewer stretches, like one, two, or three, than it is to pop into and out of a handful of stretches without giving your body time to let go. I urge you to experience this for yourself as it will become one of the tools you use to create all of these benefits I have been touting. Get it in your body, not just in your head. That is where the magic happens.

By the way, one of the best rewards for having a few stretches under your belt is when you are traveling. If you cannot get to a class, your hotel room is an excellent place to stretch and start your day. This brings back memories for me of doing headstands in the tents during our African safari. There was hardly any opportunity for us to exercise, so I relied on some yoga stretches and strengthening exercise every morning.

I promised I would discuss with you what a more advanced practice looks like. What might you expect if you fall in love with stretching and decide to make it an even more important part of your life? I think of the benchmarks to indicate your involvement. If you want to get real results that add up, stretching every other day is a minimum. If you stretch on January first and then don't stretch again until February first, the two sessions are not connected. There is no continuity. This does happen, however, when you stretch a few times per week. Progress is beautiful as you feel your body give. If your hamstrings feel tight, a dog pose every other day will help your body to feel looser and that something is happening. This benchmark is the *frequency* of your stretching practice. Committing to a class that meets once per week plus working to develop your practice at home is an excellent formula.

Another benchmark is the relative difficulty of the stretches you practice. Whether you decide on the same routine do to every day, like the once I described earlier, or you want a varied practice, in either case, allow your body to get better, looser, stronger, and more responsive. Many of the poses you can do have variations. This is an excellent way to advance in your practice. Whether your legs become more extended at the knees in a forward bend, or you add a more advanced forward bend, progress is being made. I will demonstrate this in the video I prepared for you in your free download. (Reminder, you can get this at [www.RosieBank.com/15download](http://www.RosieBank.com/15download). Again, my recommendation is for you to learn some basic stretches so that you can keep yourself engaged on your own at home for at least fifteen to twenty minutes. After a few months, you can find a teacher in a private or group setting to learn more poses, or how to add variations on the ones you do. There is no hard timeline and you can play with this any way that works for you. The point is to move forward and avoid getting into a stretching rut. A good way to describe this would be to keep your practice alive and dynamic.

You can consider a yoga retreat, which is a heavenly way to get immersed with others who also love to stretch. A weekend retreat or even a week long one is a deep dive. You can experience a more profound relationship with your body when you practice several times per day, over two or more days. Finding yoga retreats in beautiful locations, such as Hawaii and Mexico, are very easy to do on the Internet. One of my favorite locations is Rancho La Puerta in Mexico, a gorgeous health spa just south of the US/Mexico border. (<https://www.rancholapuerta.com/>) Experiencing different instructors is a big plus since each one has her or his unique style. You are bound to enrich your ability to get the most from yoga stretches in this way.

While we are talking about your deepening your practice, please be aware that some other changes may happen in your life if you indeed decide to get involved in yoga. You might

discover other dietary practices, such as vegetarianism. You might want to become a yoga teacher yourself. Perhaps you want to bring an instructor into your work place to offer to your staff or employees.

On a personal note, you might enjoy some relief from stress-related issues such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, migraines, and substance abuse. This may be among the greatest reasons to stick with your practice because of the overarching benefit to you over time. These particular benefits will most likely not occur the first time you bring your knees to your chest and roll around on the floor. But it is so worthwhile to continue with your practice to allow these more significant benefits to show themselves to you.

As I mentioned on the first part of this podcast episode, I fell in love with yoga when I was nineteen. To this day, when I practice, I enjoy the exact same benefits I have been describing to you. I feel my muscles elongate, my breath swirl around in my body, and my body rising to the challenge to be strong and balanced. Some days I am inclined to get a fantastic workout. And other days I feel like being gentle with myself and focus more on relaxation than on strength. I never judge myself for how I want to approach my practice, and I suggest you do the same.

Before I close, let me remind you to pick up your free download at [www.RosieBank.com/15download](http://www.RosieBank.com/15download). This is where I will have the poses for you as well as some references for other yoga-related resources.

We say Namasté in yoga. Literally, this means that "I bow to you." There is some divinity in each of us. We are not merely our bodies; our bodies house our spirits. Yoga is a way for you to connect with your spirit through your flesh. Namasté means that this part of me is open to connecting with this part of you. Yoga may not become a spiritual practice for you. There is

nothing inferior to your simply loving to stretch because it feels good. And at the same time, I believe it is useful that I point out to you that going deeper can be an experience of transcendence. It's wonderful to know that wherever you are on that spectrum, you and your body are better off.

This is Rosie Bank. Founder of Health Matters Coaching. Like I told you on the first half of this episode, 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.