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For a long time, stretching has been viewed as a necessary part of fitness, yet stretching itself hasnâ€™t received a lot of attention. Recent studies show how forces act on the body gives us a new way to think about stretching and gives us safe stretching techniques. When stretching, force is applied the body. Force can be defined as mass Ã— acceleration. The most dangerous forces that act on the body during stretching are forces acting on the joints. As we age joints deteriorate naturally use and age. Stretching should never contribute to this process. Our goal should be to maximize the benefits of stretching while minimizing the force on joints. To best achieve this we will use three principles when applying force; where, what direction, and how much?

The first question, where, refers to hand placement on the body. Do not place your hands directly on the joint because it can be very dangerous. There is a safe way to apply force. Start by positioning your hands 1 inch below or above the joint. That way the soft tissue that supports the joint absorbs the stress of the force. If direct force is applied to any joint, then your natural tendency is to bend it.

It is never recommended to push down while stretching. The stretching direction refers to the angle at which the force is applied. Do not push down on the joint. Instead, apply a parallel force to the body. By using this technique one minimizes the force acting straight down on the joints. Force application in a parallel fashion is needed for most lower body stretches performed lying down or sitting. These stretches include, but are not limited to, the hamstring stretch, the knee-to-chest stretch and the prone quads stretch.

It is important to use light force when stretching. Oneâ€™s flexibility determines what the definition of light force is. What is light force for some, may be hard force on others. This is decided on how flexible you are at the start. You should be careful not to use too much force. Hold each stretch for at least sixty seconds. That is the time which is consistent with current literature on long-term adaptation to stretching. The correct appropriate amount of force will vary from person to person.

Stretching should be an important part of any personal fitness routine. Effective and safe stretching relies heavily on the correct use of force at the correct angle. When applying force, us the three principles of where, what direction, and how much? If used correctly, these safe stretching techniques will better your training performance and increase the effectiveness of stretching.

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