



Benefits of Dance – Flexibility

Stretching and Flexibility for Kids

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For kids, stretches should be part of an overall, daily physical activity routine. Even though flexibility often seems to come naturally to children, we should pay attention to their level and type of activity to make sure stretching is included. Especially during growth spurts, children's and teens' muscles may be tight, and stretching can help.

Why Stretches Are Important

There are multiple advantages to stretching. Both you and your kids will enjoy these benefits if you stretch together.

Benefits of Stretching

- **Prevent injuries.**
- **Recovery after exercise.**
- **Maintain flexibility into adulthood.**
- **Agility**
- **Reduced muscle tension**
- **improved joint health and range of motion**
- **Increased blood flow to the muscles**
- **Stretching feels good**

When Kids Should Stretch

Kids can stretch before and after other physical activities, such as running, playing soccer, and so on. Or they can do an activity that incorporates stretching, such as yoga. Overall, they should do some stretching at least three times a week.

Stretching done *before* sports or other fitness activities, as part of a warm-up, should be **dynamic** (moving), not static. Dynamic stretching can include repeated arm circles, leg swings, or torso twists. *After* sports or physical play, kids should do a cool-down routine that includes some stretching. Now is the time for **static** (stationary) stretches concentrating on

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the muscle groups they used in their exercise—say, calves, hamstrings, and quads after running.

Show your child how to stretch into a position where she feels the muscle is activated (the sensation is of tightness, not pain), then hold, without bouncing, for 20 to 30 seconds. If your child has any injuries, consult a doctor, physical therapist, or athletic trainer about the safest and most effective stretching exercises for her.



Playful Stretches for Kids

These activities incorporate easy stretches that are fun and helpful for young children:

- **Simple stretch series:** Show kids this easy series that helps stretch the arms, legs, and back. As you can see, stretching outdoors and with a friend or two can make a kid's stretch session more fun.
- **Art projects:** Can art projects actually stretch large muscle groups (like arms, legs, and core)? Yes, they can! The key is to think BIG. Get kids working on large-scale creative efforts like these. You'll soon see arms reaching, toes pointing, backs bending, and more.
- **Tape it:** Use a roll of painter's tape or masking tape to create your own stretching game on the floor. Make tape targets (any size or shape you like) and then incorporate them into a Twister-style game. You can also use pieces of rubber matting, such as from an old yoga mat, instead of tape. Outside, make your targets with sidewalk chalk.
- **"Board" games:** The [Dr. Seuss Super Stretchy ABC Game](#) is another take-off on Twister. But this one swaps in the letters of the alphabet for those famous, primary-colored dots. So the game offers both easy stretches for kids and a chance to review the alphabet too. Plus it features Thing 1 and Thing 2 from the *Cat in the Hat* books.
- **Picture books:** Doreen Cronin, author of family favorites like *Diary of a Worm* and *Click, Clack, Moo*, also has a charming series of rhyming books featuring a dog that likes to *Wiggle, Bounce*, and—of course!—*Stretch*. Check it out and follow along. Another fun option is *My Daddy Is a Pretzel: Yoga for Parents and Kids* by Baron Baptiste.
- **Adventure parks:** For bigger kids, the climbing opportunities you'll find at an [adventure park](#) offer the chance to really reach and stretch large muscles. [Playing in the snow](#) provides some of the same opportunities!

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