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## BEYOND THE LIMITS OF STRETCHING

It's surprising how many people all over the world stretch to lengthen their muscles. Some do slow passive stretches, others more bouncing stretches, some perform continuous active stretches, or variations on old techniques like PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation).

While there is little research to support the idea that stretching muscles before a sporting event protects the joints, tendons, ligaments or muscles from injury, there remains an overwhelmingly strong public concept that stretching lengthens your muscles.

Fortunately, many involved in athletic activities know that it's smarter to warm the muscles of the body before doing any form of intense exercise or stretching. The muscles and connective tissues will lengthen much easier when warm in the same way that glass becomes more fluid with increased temperatures.

But the smartest way to prepare for a sport and protect oneself from injury is to "tune up" the neuromuscular system. Your brain can change the resting length of a muscle by performing movements that require the sensation of shortness or length in the muscle to change this is best done by performing activities that require greater length in the muscles. For example: If you bent over and tied and untied your shoes five different ways, the brain requirements for the movements of your fingers, eyes, arms, head and neck would create the conditions for your back extensors and your hamstrings to be longer. It would not be necessary to stretch because you are performing a functional activity that requires the creation of new brain-muscle connections. Stretching the hamstrings is a very vague activity, just as stretching the muscles of the back requires little brain-muscle re-organization.

Also, if you wanted to speak more clearly or sing better, you wouldn't think of holding your tongue between your fingers and stretching it we know one would have to practice activities involving the jaw, lips, and breath in order to improve our speaking or singing abilities. However, when it comes to thinking of the larger muscles of our trunk and limbs,

we tend not to think of what our brain requires, but instead we treat our muscles as pieces of meat without any relationship to our brain.

In Feldenkrais movement lessons you will find more interesting and longer-lasting ways to lengthen your muscles. The more you participate in movement activities from the Feldenkrais Method, the less you will feel the need to stretch in order to obtain length; you will simply feel longer and more supple. Please enjoy the lessons below and move beyond the limits of your tissue.

Enjoy the lesson!

Frank Wildman, Ph.D., GCFT

To Listen to this Lesson, Please click [here](#).

How to do the lesson

\* Go Slowly. Time is an extremely valuable tool in the Feldenkrais Method. The movements you are learning may seem unusual and unfamiliar to you. You will need time to assimilate them, to feel the way your body is moving and changing. Do not rush! Pause whenever you feel like it and repeat movements you find pleasurable or want to experience more fully.

\* Insist on Comfort. There is no reward in doing any of the movements in an uncomfortable position. Gently alter the position in whatever way makes it comfortable for you. I want you to enjoy the process of the movement as much as the result. If it hurts, it's not helping you ("No pain, no gain" does not apply in this method!) Never try to overcome pain, if you feel it. Pain is a signal that your body is asking you to find a new way to move. Answer it with gentleness and respect.

\* Don't test your limits. The Feldenkrais Method is not about seeing how far you can move, how high you can lift, how long you can stretch. Your goal should be to discover how your body achieves a movement so that you can learn to make that movement easier. Your movements should always be light, and as effortless as possible. Imagine how good it will feel to do simple mobile tasks without trying hard, without working.

\* Use your imagination. Take the time to do different movements from these lessons in your head only, before doing them in practice. Allow the movement to become very clear and lucid in your mind, like a scene from a movie. Imagine a movement before attempting it can make an enormous difference in your ease of motion. You may find that your body responds to your mind by moving as if it is replaying the imagined movement, with almost no effort at all.

\* Rest frequently. The movements in these lessons, while gentle and pleasurable, may cause slight strain because you are using parts of muscles you may not have used in a long time, or in ways that are not familiar to you. Rest often during each lesson. You cannot rest too much. Relax and let the movement settle in, enjoy the feeling. Who knows it could become a habit.

\* Take the lessons with you. Throughout your day, pay close attention to how a lesson affected you. One way to do this is to keep a notebook and write down what you have felt from the lessons, and how it influenced the way you performed everyday activities. Be aware of changes in the way you reach, walk, sit, and think. Putting your sensations into words builds a new sensory vocabulary and expands your body awareness, increasing aliveness and changing fixed habits of thinking and feeling. A lesson doesn't have to end with its last movement let the learning process linger and grow.