

7 Ways Stretching Helps You Manage Your Weight

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It sounds gimmicky, I know, but as we all can attest, weight management, while simple in concept –calories in versus calories out, turns out to be an extremely complex process. Off the top of your head, you can probably name ten barriers you face to keeping your weight where you want it, and also ten strategies that you find particularly helpful. And that's just scratching the surface! More and more, we in the fitness industry are appreciating how much the solutions to losing weight – and keeping it off – often lie in seemingly unrelated strategies. Stretching, while arguably beneficial for many reasons, may not appear an immediately obvious partner in turning the weight loss tides in your favor. But read the following list and see if you don't change your mind!

1. **It makes you feel good**

If you've ever received a soothing massage, it's probably safe to say you didn't immediately feel like running out and ordering a triple-threat burrito dinner. Stretching has the same effect, leaving you refreshed and feeling great. And when you feel great, you're far more likely to nurture your body with good food, and to avoid the stuff your body doesn't need.

2. **It can be an important first (or next) step**

Whether you're in a bit of a rut or a full-blown relapse from positive health habits, it can be hard to get your wheels in motion. The phrase "jump in running," while sometimes applicable, isn't always the way to go. Adding stretching to your weekly activities can provide just that needed bridge between stagnation and action, which can lead to bigger and better things.

3. **It makes exercise feel good, too**

Let's face it: few of us could commit to an activity, however "good" for us, if we anticipate feeling uncomfortable every time we do it. Since much of the potential discomfort associated with exercise can be attributed to tight and weak muscles, it stands to reason that regular stretching can alleviate much, if not all, of this obstacle, making the prospect of regular exercise (which we know to be essential in weight management) actually enjoyable!

4. **It increases the effectiveness of other exercises**

File this one under "If you don't have to do more than the bare minimum, why do it?" We're all time-pressed. So wouldn't you like to get the most out of that 20-minute walk or that 30-minute strength routine? Stretching can help with this. Because when you move more freely, through your full range of motion, you burn more calories, and your muscles work harder. Translation: more "bang" for your exercise "buck."

5. **It slows you down....AND it wakes you up**

No other form of exercise can make this claim, which at first glance seems contradictory. But indeed, with so many positions and movements to choose from, you can use stretching to boost your energy and alertness (thus nixing the need for that afternoon snack), and also to calm down a ravenous appetite and soften the grip of emotional eating. And you can do this with as little as just a few minutes of targeted stretching and mindful breathing!

6. **It's calorie-free**

I know. Duh. In fact, as my accountant husband politely pointed out, it's actually calorie-negative (even better!). But what I mean by this is in reference to breaking bad habits – in this case, switching out a habit that is food-related with one that is not. After all, it is said that a bad habit is infinitely easier to break when you have an alternate activity – a pleasurable one, at that -- to replace it. A quick yet relaxing stretch routine can provide an enjoyable replacement for, as an example, that all-too-common pitfall of late-night snacking. And the bonus is, if you stretch right before bed you'll probably sleep better, too!

7. **It's something you can do RIGHT NOW**

Probably the best weight management advantage of all: you can stretch almost anywhere, almost anytime. You don't have to change clothes or go to the gym and you don't need any special room or equipment. Remember, success is the compilation of many small steps, not just one or two huge undertakings. By infusing your day with the positive effects of stretching, you'll continue to steer yourself in the direction of other positive lifestyle activities!

