



## **9. Stretching--When Is It Too Much Of A Good Thing?**

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(Special thanks to Dr. Stephen M. Pribut)

We have been taught since our earliest days in Taekwondo that stretching is the key to increased range of motion, easier movement, and injury prevention. In recent years, many of the traditional stretches that were ballistic in nature (meaning you bounced when you did them) have been shown to be dangerous and have now been discarded. In addition, other potentially injurious stretches such as the Hurdler's Stretch (which places undue pressure on the knees) have been modified to bring the desired results of stretching without the potential of causing the body harm. But, can something as beneficial to Taekwondo training as proper stretching technique still be harmful in certain situations?

Dr. Stephen M. Pribut, a Washington, DC Podiatrist, who practices podiatric medicine and surgery with special interests in Sports Medicine and Biomechanics, points out that even something as beneficial to an athlete as stretching can be overdone.

"Surveys of runners have shown that there seem to be two types of runners who have reported more injuries than others. Those who do not stretch very much and those who spend an inordinate amount of time stretching both seem to have significantly more injuries. This is not necessarily a causal relationship. The fact that a survey has shown that an individual who spends much longer than his peers stretching responds to a survey question reporting many injuries might also imply that he is stretching in response to his injuries. But then again, too much of a good thing might not be good.

Because your flexibility and muscle elasticity can diminish from time off due to injury, martial artists are often eager to return to their stretching routine. However, Dr. Pribut warns not to begin stretching while injured as this can turn a minor injury into a chronic injury.

"The reason you should not start stretching with an acutely sore body part is that your stretching will probably contribute to continuing to tear the muscle or tendon fibers during your stretching of it," notes Dr. Pribut.

As martial artists, we often feel that we can never train too hard, and like all athletes we want to come back from our injuries as quickly as possible. Dr. Pribut offers a great reminder that even something as beneficial as stretching can be harmful if overdone, or if done before our body has recovered from injury.