

# \* Focused on Flexibility

## IMPROVING OVERALL FITNESS AND WELL-BEING

*As our bodies get older, our flexibility decreases due to joint stiffness and pain caused by arthritis and inflammation. Many accept this as a natural process of aging and adjust their lifestyles to their physical limitations. But if you get up, move, and stretch on a regular basis, you can maintain and even improve your flexibility and overall health.*

When most of us think of exercise, we think of walking, jogging, swimming, playing a team sport, or any activity that gets our hearts beating and makes us sweat. As we age, we also know the importance of retaining muscle mass, so we may incorporate strength training into our fitness regimen. In contrast, stretching is something we may or may not do for a minute before or after our *real* workout. As long as we get our cardio and lift a few weights, we're good, right?

Wrong.

Contrary to popular belief, stretching is not just something you do before or after a workout to prevent soreness (although when done properly, this is one of the benefits). A stretching

routine is a vital part of overall fitness, and it should be performed two to three times a week by everyone, especially older adults.

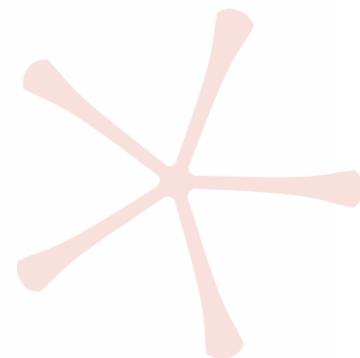
### **Ballistic & Dynamic Stretching**

Remember bouncing up and down repeatedly to touch your toes in junior high gym class? That type of stretching is known as **ballistic** stretching. It has a tendency to cause injury and is no longer recommended. Often confused with ballistic stretching, **dynamic** stretching uses slow and controlled movements to gradually move muscles beyond their normal ranges of motion. A slow, controlled torso twist is an example of a dynamic stretch.

By Julianne Hale

### **Did you know?**

Research indicates that stretching actually promotes muscle growth, which is a big deal for seniors who face a gradual loss of muscle mass after age 40.



**Best Fitness Activities for Increasing Flexibility and Reducing Stiffness**

**Yoga.** “Yoga classes that combine relaxing breathing techniques with slow movement from one stretch/posture to the next are great for releasing tightness,” says Jessica Jollie, a yoga instructor with Yoga Landing. “Regular yoga practice can lead to a relaxed mind, better posture, and an overall sense of well-being.”

**Pilates.** Pilates is a lot like yoga but emphasizes your body’s core — the abdomen, obliques, lower back, inner and outer thigh, etc.

**Water fitness.** “Water exercising and stretching are beneficial to preventing and/or relieving joint stiffness because water is more dense than air,” says Frances Archer, a water aerobics instructor at the Sports Barn. “This gives the joints the ability to flex and extend with considerable less pain.”



**Frances Archer**  
water aerobics instructor, the Sports Barn

**Active Stretching**

If you’ve ever taken a yoga class, you know how challenging it can be to hold those poses. Many yoga positions are a form of **active** stretching, which involves holding a position with no assistance from anything but the body. Active stretching builds muscle *and* increases flexibility, so it’s great for the body.

**Passive Stretching**

Ever sat on the floor after exercising and used the ground to stretch your legs and body? This is **passive** stretching. It’s a great way to relax the body after a workout, and it helps reduce soreness and fatigue. **Static** stretching is a form of passive stretching in which you hold each position for an extended period to increase flexibility.

**Isometric Stretching**

**Isometric** stretching is one of the most effective ways to increase flexibility. This method involves using resistance from

the body to flex the muscles in opposition to the resistance. An example would be straightening your leg while holding onto the ball of your foot with your hand. Proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation (PNF), a technique combining passive and isometric stretching, is often used to



**Jessica Jollie**  
yoga instructor, Yoga Landing

rehabilitate stroke victims; it’s currently known as one of the quickest and most effective techniques for improving range of motion. In this technique, stretched muscles are contracted isometrically and then relaxed.

**What you need to know**

A fitness professional can help you decide what type of stretching is right for you. It’s important to warm up for a few minutes so you aren’t stretching cold muscles. Take a short walk, or spend a few minutes on a stationary bike or treadmill. Once your body is warmed up, you will need to take the time to stretch each of the major muscle groups. Focus on the calves, thighs, hips, lower back, neck, and shoulders. Always make sure to give both sides equal time. Hold each stretch for about 30 seconds, and repeat it three to four times.

When stretching, always remember to pay attention to your body. Are you in pain? If so, back off. Pain does not mean gain when it comes to stretching. Mild discomfort is okay, but pain is not. Stretch for about 30 minutes two to three times per week for maximum results. If that seems like a large commitment, try 20 minutes and see how you feel after four weeks. If you prefer a group setting or need some direction, give tai chi or yoga a try. Several gyms offer classes designed for older adults and they can be a great way to meet people and be consistent about exercise.

When stretching, safety should always be a top priority. Before starting a stretching routine, consult a doctor if there is a particular part of your body that you would like to focus on, or if you have limitations due to a surgery or a medical condition. Stretching is not a one-size-fits-all kind of practice. Each person will have different limitations, different ranges of motion, and different needs. It is important to listen to your body and follow its lead; your flexibility will increase gradually.

**Enjoying the benefits**

After your stretching routine has taken root and become a habit, you will begin to notice some positive changes in your body and life. Your flexibility will improve, and with it, your range of motion. Remember feeling pain when you bent down to pick things up? Picking up items off the floor may be a breeze now, as well as other tasks that were difficult in the past—tying shoes, pulling weeds, and a variety of everyday activities.

Regular stretching can also make you a better athlete. If you enjoy a tennis match or a round of golf on the weekends, stretching can really make a difference in your ability to perform. In addition, stretching can reduce chronic back pain and promote circulation, increasing blood flow to muscles and allowing for greater nutrient transportation throughout the body. Stretching is a simple act that may not seem important, but if done consistently and properly, it can truly be life-changing. 📺



**Providing care. Preserving dignity.**

Morning Pointe Assisted Living can help manage the uncertainty of caring for an aging loved one, while enhancing their independence. At Morning Pointe, trained staff listen to learn the resident’s preferences and needs. Each care plan for your family is tailored to assure dignity and enhance quality of life.

Assistance with medication, transportation to appointments, delicious meals... whatever your loved one needs, Morning Pointe Assisted Living is here.

**This is the life... Assisted Living at its Best!**



**Morning Pointe**  
Assisted Living & Alzheimer’s Memory Care

Chattanooga • Collegedale/Greenbriar Cove • Hixson

For more information, call **238-5330**.

Learn more at [www.morningpointe.com](http://www.morningpointe.com)



Personal Care Home



**WOODHAVEN**

**Full Time, Respite & Adult Daycare  
24 Hour Personal Care**

Nestled in the valley of Trenton, GA, just 20 minutes from Chattanooga, our care and assist home provides 24 hour assistance from a trained staff for those wanting to retain independence in a warm, comfortable environment.

**6246 Highway 136,  
Trenton, GA 30752**

**706-657-5216**

[woodhavenpch.com](http://woodhavenpch.com)

# Moving forward:

## TREATING PARKINSON'S DISEASE

By Julia Wilhelm, Life Care Public Relations



**B**uttoning a shirt, writing a check and walking to the mailbox are tasks most people do each day with ease. Imagine that these tasks are now difficult for you, or even impossible. This is the reality for the millions of individuals living with Parkinson's disease.

Most people are familiar with Parkinson's disease. Many individuals know, or have come into contact with, someone who experiences the uncontrollable shaking or other symptoms that Parkinson's disease creates. This aggressive disease affects many, but there is hope for the individuals affected by it.

### **What is Parkinson's disease?**

Parkinson's disease is the most common nervous system disorder in adults over the age of 50. This disease results from loss or impairment of brain cells that produce dopamine, a chemical that controls muscle movement throughout the body. If dopamine is not produced in the brain, the brain is unable to control the muscles of the body.

Symptoms of Parkinson's disease include tremors, slowness of movement, stiffness in extremities and poor balance. Some patients may experience "freezing" or suddenly being unable to move while walking. Other symptoms include loss of facial expression, low voice volume or cramped handwriting due to the loss of fine motor control.

Parkinson's is a progressive disorder, meaning early symptoms may be slight, or even undetectable, and vary from individual to individual. As the disease progresses, symptoms become more noticeable.

### **What causes Parkinson's disease?**

The specific cause of Parkinson's disease is unknown. However, some factors have been linked to the development of Parkinson's. In rare cases, exposure to environmental toxins has led to Parkinson's. Some genetic mutations have also been linked to the development of Parkinson's disease. While Parkinson's can be hereditary, genetic development of the disease usually only occurs in families in which multiple relatives have Parkinson's disease. Typically, men are more likely to develop Parkinson's than women, and older adults are more likely to develop the disease than younger individuals.

### **How do you treat Parkinson's disease?**

Currently, there is no cure for Parkinson's disease. Many individuals treat their Parkinson's symptoms with medications and rehabilitation therapy to maintain functionality. Neurological rehabilitation is typically combined with physical, occupational and speech therapies to help patients reach their goals.

Lee Silverman Voice Treatment (LSVT) BIG™ is a physical therapy treatment that trains patients to make "bigger" movements. Parkinson's disease leads to a decrease in muscle function, leaving sufferers with poor balance and the ability to walk only with small, short steps. This treatment teaches the amount of effort required to produce normal movements, and translates them into real-world situations. Outcomes of LSVT BIG include improved balance and rotation, as well as faster walking with bigger steps.

LSVT LOUD™ is a speech therapy treatment that trains patients to speak with loud voice volume. One of the effects of Parkinson's disease is hearing faulty feedback sounds, causing patients to speak more softly than needed. LSVT LOUD trains patients to correct mumbled, hoarse, monotone and soft speech with strong, clear speech.

Medicating Parkinson's disease is difficult and often loses its effect over time. The purpose for most Parkinson's medications is to be converted to dopamine in the brain, thus helping the brain control muscle function again. These medications offer short-term relief for Parkinson's symptoms but often come with a lengthy list of side effects.

### **How do I know if I have Parkinson's disease?**

Parkinson's disease may be affecting you if you experience:

- Changes in walking ability
- Balance problems
- Difficulty getting out of a chair or car
- Difficulty with dressing, bathing or other activities that require fine motor control
- Difficulty swallowing
- Changes in voice or speech
- Changes in short-term memory or problem solving ability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Changes in mood

Consult with your physician if you experience any of these symptoms. Early detection leads to the best management of Parkinson's disease.

While the cause and cure for Parkinson's remain a mystery, treatments and medications continue to improve due to ongoing research. If you or a loved one suffer from Parkinson's disease, you may find help from a local support group, in addition to family and friends.

For more information about Parkinson's disease and support groups, visit the National Parkinson's Foundation website at [parkinson.org](http://parkinson.org).

Life Care Centers of America 