

# Stretched truths

## Is stretching before exercise really good for you?

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“And then to my disbelief, I had no more lower back pain. I couldn't believe it. And this is just one of many examples...”

I have practised boxing and Muay Thai since 1988 and always wondered why I had chronic lower back pain.

During this time I was practising acupuncture, Rolfer, and was a physical trainer in Hawaii and Japan, and I attended a seminar for Muscle Activation Techniques (MAT). So one day, after an MAT seminar, I decided to not do any long stretching before boxing.

And then to my disbelief, I had no more lower back pain. I couldn't believe it. And this is just one of many examples that have proved that stretching before exercising can result in injury.

It all started many years ago. I had been in the healthcare field over 18 years at that time and during the seminar, the instructor asked me if I thought muscle tension was a good thing or a bad thing? To which I responded that I thought “too much tension was bad”.

“If muscle has no tension, then the muscle works properly?” he asked. Obviously not.

In a tug of war game, the loose rope cannot pull the opponent can it? So, if muscle has no tension, then the muscle does not work properly? The instructor then said a very interesting thing to me.

“If the muscle is stretched, does stretching loosen the muscle?”

Logically yes. But, he explained that muscles function, it can change in length, which means moving leverage, and also, one very important function is the co-contraction to protect joints.

I understood the first point, but I didn't really understand the second one. He explained using the elbow joint makes the biceps and triceps co-contraction, which makes the elbow joint stabilise. Without co-contraction, the elbow joint is not protected by muscle tension.

It's not difficult in understanding that muscle tension is vital for joint protection, but what puzzled me was the concept regarding stretching. If stretching reduces muscle tension, then why is stretching so bad? What about yoga and pilates?

■ **Throughout life I had heard that stretching did the following:**

1. Reduces the chance for injury

2. Increases flexibility
3. Increases blood flow
4. Helps one to relax

However, after carrying out research on the history of stretching, I found the first book about stretching, which was published by American writer Bob Anderson back in 1975 informing the public of the benefits of stretching. Then I found some very interesting research the Australian army conducted in 1998.

The research included a study on 1,538 soldiers, including a group that did no stretching and a group that did. Three months later, the studies showed stretching does not reduce any risk of injury. Following this research, many reports against stretching finally started to surface.

In Kinesiology, there are muscle tests to prove this theory. After a long static stretch, the muscle test carried out by various techniques have shown a 100 per cent muscle test fail (we will discuss this more in a later article).

If one of the jobs of the muscles is to protect the joint and the muscle shuts down, then is it a good thing to stretch before?

Some research in fact shows that stretching causes more injury.

■ **What about Range Of Motion (ROM)?**

If the muscle protects joint, there is more ROM, but if your muscle shuts down, there is less ROM. If you stretch, does it inhibit the muscle? If you sit, hamstring stretching

increases ROM.

Is muscle tension good? Too much tension decreases blood flow, and causes pain and stiffness. Having said that, the muscle needs to be tense to be contracted.

If stretching makes the bridge loosen, will the muscle work optimally? And can stretching ever be good for exercise?

### Conclusion

■ **All in all, it is vital not to do any static stretching before exercising, as it can cause:**

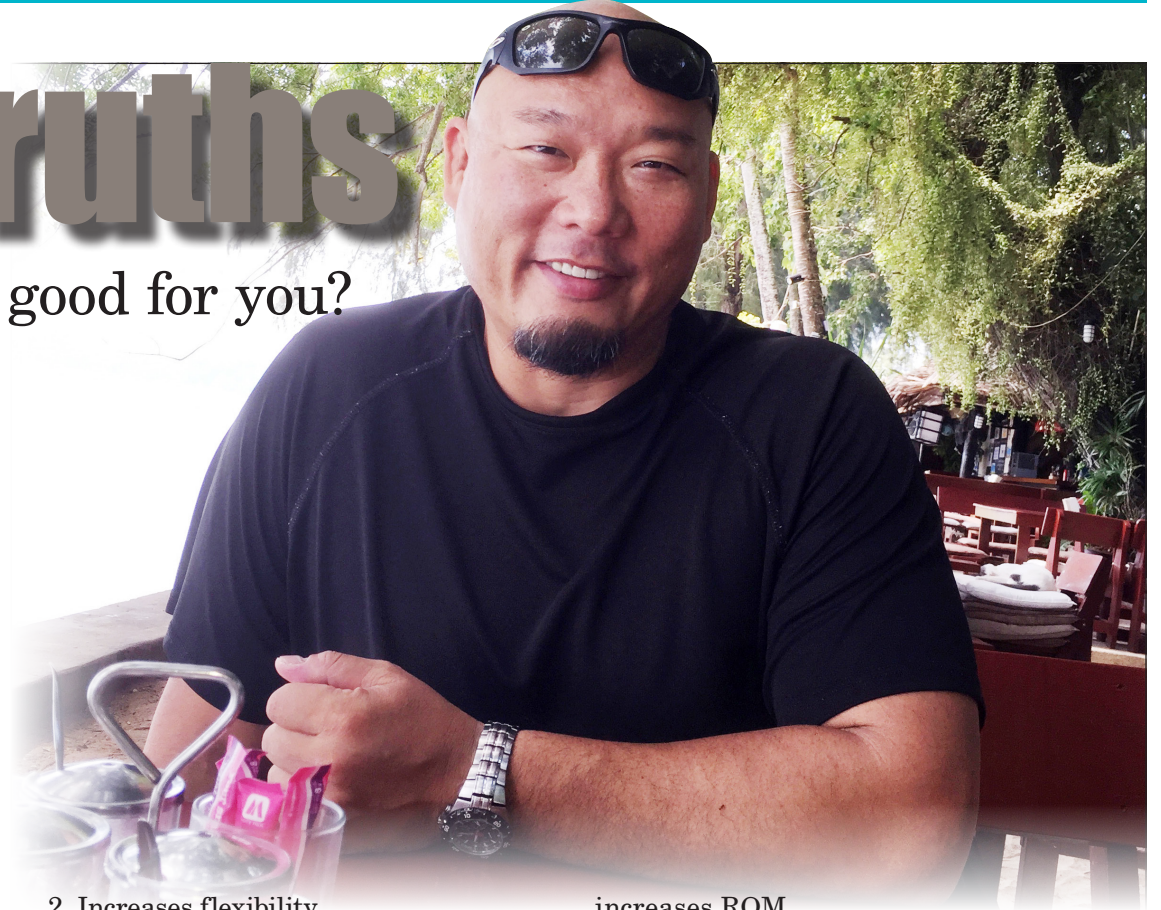
- 1- More injury
- 2- Less performance

There are different types of stretching that can enhance a person's performance. It's important to remember that each person has a different goal for exercise.

But, what I will say is, I do not recommend doing stretching just before exercising when the muscle is not warm, but instead in a still, cold condition. It's not that a person shouldn't do any form of stretching, it's that they need to understand when they should.

If someone should stretch before exercising, they will more likely end up with an injury. For example, before doing Muay Thai, the person should go for a light jog before, but there is no need to do standard stretching positions, as one would have previously thought.

*If you have any questions, visit biomc.com or call Toshi on +66-(0)99-362-1005. Be sure to tune in for my next article in a few weeks.*



**Toshi Toyoda is one of 200 Muscle Activation Technique “Master Specialists” in the world. Currently living in Phuket, Toshi became a Resistant Specialist Master and a Master Specialist eight years ago. The Phuket News featured a story on him back in September and will be featuring a series of important muscle and exercising facts over the next few months. Read on for the first part on stretching.**

## Pneumonia, dengue most deadly illnesses in 2015



The striped *Aedes albopictus* mosquito carries and transmits the dengue virus, which was the second most deadly disease in Thailand in 2015, killing 116.

Pneumonia topped the list of the five diseases posing the greatest risk to Thai people last year, claiming 406 lives and sending over 190,000 people to hospital.

A total of 192,189 people of all ages, from babies to the elderly, were hospitalised for treatment of pneumonia in 2015, according to Health Ministry statistics.

This was a considerable reduction on 2014, when a total of 207,710 patients were treated for pneumonia, and 893 died.

Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lung caused by the build up of excess fluids and pus caused by an immune response to a viral, bacterial or fungal infection. It is prevalent during the cool season, particularly in the North and Northeast and ar-



Hand, foot and mouth disease affected tens of thousands and killed three in Thailand last year. Photo: KlatschmohnAcker

reas with more rain.

The four other most prevalent serious illnesses were dengue hemorrhagic fever, food poisoning, influenza, and hand, foot and mouth disease.

Dengue hemorrhagic fever caused 123,169 people to seek treatment and killed 116 people. The largest number

of patients were aged 10-14 years, followed by the 5-9 years group and then 15-24 years of age.

The most cases of hemorrhagic fever were reported in the Central Plains, followed by the Northeast and the North.

Food poisoning came third on the list and sent 120,126 people to seek treatment at hospitals last year. No deaths were reported. Most cases occurred at schools.

Influenza sent 69,798 people seeking treatment and claimed 28 lives. It mostly occurred in the Central Plains and the North.

Hand, foot and mouth disease infected 37,330 people and killed three people. The disease mostly occurred at nurseries, child care centres and kindergartens. Bangkok Post