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Renovation

CONTRACTOR

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Cedar Creek Decks

HEALTHY

DR. CHRIS OSWALD

On-the-job Straining

JUST LIKE YOUR TRUCK AND TOOLS, YOUR BODY NEEDS SOME WARM-UP TIME (AND THE ODD TUNE-UP) TO OPERATE AT PEAK EFFICIENCY

Most of us are significantly less active from November

to March than we are from April through October. So, even after a relatively mild winter like the one that just past, our bodies have stiffened, which makes us prone to injury.

With the warm weather leading to more activity, there are certain to be more aches and pains. Why not implement a daily stretching routine to prevent injuries, reduce pain, feel better, and get the most out of life?

I recommend stretching in a warm shower every morning to prepare your body for the abuse you

will put it through in your line of work each day. The warm water makes it easy to stay in the shower a little longer and the heat

once we've been up and moving but once our day starts the chance of finding time for ourselves goes down dramatically.

“Hold each stretch for 30 seconds, or until you feel the release in muscle tension.”

relaxes the muscles, which shortens the amount of time you may need to stretch. The morning is the time when we are the stiffest, and it may seem like we would do better

Also, waiting till we hurt ourselves and then stretching is counterproductive.

My six rules for stretching are:

1. Warm-up in the shower after you've washed up.

- 2.** Hold each stretch for 30 seconds, or until you feel the release in muscle tension.
- 3.** Always do both sides; balance is key. If one side doesn't stretch as far, then hold it longer until it is equal to the other. This means you are assessing your mechanics every day and resetting yourself to the place or state you were in the day before. How can your body mechanics decline if you do this?
- 4.** Gentle is key - no pulling the head to the shoulder or forcing it. If the muscles sense

danger they will shorten to protect themselves.

5. Breathe deeply using the diaphragm. Your stomach should go out as you breathe in, and go in when you exhale. Oxygen helps the circulation and circulation helps the muscles relax.
6. Never bounce. Remain still and focus on form.

Since every activity involves certain movements, specific muscles, and has a common list of injuries related to it, it is wise to think ahead about the day's job. Envision what it entails and try to remember what hurt the last time you did this task. Then modify your preparation for that activity. Take deck building, for example.

The day will likely go something like this: dig some postholes and strain your buttocks, the front of your thighs near the knees, and your calf muscles. Next, start pitching the dirt with a shovel and

strain your spinal rotators and hip flexors. Pour concrete for the posts and hurt your lower back. Haul some lumber around and strain your lower back further, and then spend an extended period of time bent over nailing in the deck boards, putting further strain on your lower back and really tightening up those front hip flexors. By the time you leave the site you are "antalgic" - leaning to one side or the other to minimize the pain.

Here are five key stretches that you can do in 10 minutes before and after the job to avoid the strain. Be sure you follow the six rules mentioned earlier:

1. With your feet shoulder-width apart and one arm straight up in the air, tilt from the waist to the opposite side.
2. Standing, pull your heel to your buttocks and lean the torso forward to open the front hip flexors and quads. Try to get your thigh

parallel to the floor. It will take some time to master the move, but this can seriously reduce the risk of lower-back injuries.

3. Stand up straight. Raise one leg straight up so the heel rests on a table anywhere from knee to waist height, as long as the knee is straight.
4. Lay on your back and pull a bent knee to your chest. If you have knee issues, hold the leg that you are pulling to the chest behind the knee.
5. Stand and lean your hands on the wall.

Keeping your leg straight, step back with one leg, keeping it straight, and put your heel flat on the ground with your toes pointing forward. This stretches the calf muscle.

As we age, we're bound to feel the physical symptoms of the hard labour we put our bodies through each day. But a little preventative maintenance goes a long way to help alleviate and even prevent the worst problems.

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