

Paper catching up on stretching research

In my effort to bring all those who read these articles the most current and progressive information within the world of strength training and conditioning, I am often baffled by what is offered in everyday magazines, advertisements, infomercials and newspapers.

Society is still stuck on how many abdominal exercises in a short period of time will make your stomach flat. But one enlightening, robust article from *The New York Times* has recaptured my hopes that more and more energy is being placed to change the traditional ways of how we think about performance in the media.

"Stretching: The Truth," negates preconceived thoughts about warm-up exercises we all learned in grade school, ones that are no longer beneficial. Specifically, static stretching (holding a stretch for 20 or 30 seconds) you still see before any movement activity such as golf, running, biking, tennis or skiing. It explains how static stretching is a harmful warm-up routine and numerous studies believe that dynamic stretch-

ing is the proper excitatory response for muscles to undergo before movement.

At the All Body Therapy Building, Training to be Balanced's new training facility, we perform what is called "movement prep," which replaces the words "warm-up." Movement prep does just that, prepares the body for movement, activation or "turning on" the nerves and muscles of the body. This activation is a strategy that enhances the excitability of the neuromuscular and muscle sequencing. Sequencing is synonymous with synergy in that muscles and nerves work in a kinetic chain to produce the maximal amount of force or movement pattern. Proper activation increases range of motion and prepares the

body to handle acceleration and deceleration.

Almost any type of mild movement that is active works as movement prep. Choose movement patterns that move many body parts at once or movements that stabilize one area of the body while others move. Pick movements that can be done

anywhere and at any time (such as at the top of a skiing hill). A few big movement prep exercises at the beginning of a bike ride, a run, a climb or a day of skiing make a whole world of difference.

The approach made to movement prep should be to prepare the body for movement, not just stretch it out. I ask all those who train at Training to be Balanced to perform movements that activate or "turn on" the muscles and mobilize the major joints in the body.

The *Times* article continues with a few examples of movement-based exercises for movement prep. Here are a few movement-prep exercises that we perform at Training to be Balanced.

The first is "scorpion." Lie on your stomach with feet flexed, arms out to the side, palms down and reach flexed heel up and over (not down to the floor) to the opposite hand without that hand moving. Hold for one second and repeat on the other side.

Second is the calf movement. Hands and feet on the floor with hips up so body forms an "A" frame. Cross one foot over the other ankle. Move the foot that is on the floor up on the ball of foot, hold for 1 second, bring heel down back to the floor. When heel

in on the floor bring the toes up (toes won't move but activating the front of the shin bone muscles will occur). Help by pushing down with the foot that is crossed over the ankle. This is a continuous motion with one-second holds at each end.

Third is a "dragon." From standing, step out into a large, exaggerated right lunge with the right forearm flat on floor next to right foot. Next, place the right hand next to the right foot, reach left hand up above body, then bring hands on either side of the right foot and bring hips and right foot up with the right leg straight. Again, this is a continuous motion with one-second holds at each end.

I have great respect for *The New York Times*, even though it is about five years behind on current exercise training. Nonetheless, the information is out there and I hope society can start to change habits toward efficiency. (The *Times* article is located at www.nytimes.com/2008/11/02/sports/playmagazine).

Movement specialist Augustine "Augie" Hernandez Jr. owns Training to Be Balanced LLC. Reach him at augie@t2bb.net or www.trainingtobebalanced.net.



Training to be balanced

Augie Hernandez