**Presenter Guidelines:**

1. This program is designed to be presented at chapter to address the importance of flexibility as a vital component to physical fitness, everyday movement, and overall well-being. It has been written as a basic script for you to make presentation easier.

2. Members should be prepared for light movement, as the program includes a series of standing stretches. Presenter should familiarize themselves with the series of stretches prior to the chapter meeting.

3. Copy page 4 (Tips for Safe Stretching & Flexibility Goal) to distribute at the appropriate time near the end of the program.

4. After greeting the members, begin.

Flexibility is often the most often overlooked component of fitness. Yet, when it comes to staying limber, easing muscle tension, and making everyday activities easier, flexibility is key.

If your back is often stiff, raise your hand. Are your legs stiff pretty often, too? Raise your hand. Raise your hand if your neck or shoulders are stiff. Are you too stiff to even raise your hand? Take a look at all of the raised hands. Feeling stiff is problem common among many people.

Many of us tend to think that a lack of flexibility is a normal part of aging, but this does not have to be so. We are not sentenced to stiff muscles! Regular stretching can improve and maintain flexibility, regardless of our age.

A simple definition of flexibility is a joint’s ability to move through a full range of motion. Stretching regularly helps to improve range of motion, making everyday activities – such as bending over to pick up a bag of groceries or reaching for a shelf – easier and less taxing. That’s something from which everyone can benefit!

Before we learn more about flexibility and stretching, let’s limber up! Don’t worry, we will not be twisting ourselves into pretzels, just performing a series of light, standing stretches that will help us feel loose, limber, and energized! This series of stretches is designed to flow together nicely and can be performed after your morning walk, during a lunch break, or whenever you need to loosen up.

Let’s all stand, now, and move gently in place – you can march in place, shake out your arms, or whatever you can do. I’ll be
asking you some questions as we warm up like this – let’s see how much we know about stretching and flexibility.

(allow for 2-3 responses for each of the following 3 questions, keep the group moving as they answer questions)

Does anyone here stretch regularly? If so, please describe what you do.

(elicit 2-3 responses, keeping the group moving as they answer)

Has anyone ever tried yoga or tai chi, either in a class or with a video, CD or DVD?

(allow members to respond with a show of hands)

Do you know of any other activities that improve flexibility?

(encourage responses -- possible answers may include pilates, ballet, modern dance, martial arts, swimming, balance or stability ball)

Now we will begin a series of stretches, holding each one for 10 seconds. Remember to take slow deep breaths throughout these stretches.

1. Stand with your arms at your sides, feet shoulder-width apart.

2. Slowly angle your head to the right so that you feel a slight tension in your neck. Hold it, then repeat same movement on the other side.

3. Roll your shoulders slowly forward, then slowly back, all while taking deep, relaxed breaths.

4. Now, stretch your arms out to your sides at shoulder level. Gently move your shoulders back and together, and lift your chest toward your chin. You should feel a nice gentle stretch in your chest.

5. Bring your arms forward and raise them up over your head while interlacing fingers. Press the palms of your hands up toward the ceiling and keep the heels of your feet pressed to the ground. Draw your belly button in toward your spine, to support your lower back. Hold this position and remember to take deep, relaxed breaths.

6. Keep your arms raised, and fingers interlaced. Gently lean to your right side as far as is comfortable. Hold this position while taking deep breaths, then slowly lean to your left side.

7. Keep your arms in a raised, overhead position and bend your left arm behind your head. Place your right hand on your left elbow and very gently pull so that you feel a nice stretch the back of your arm – that is your left tricep. Hold this position then switch arms and repeat with your right tricep.

8. Reach up over your head again and slowly fan your arms out to the side. Then extend your arms in front at shoulder height in one sweeping motion.

9. Interlace your fingers with the palms facing outward, reaching away from your body. You should feel a nice stretch in your upper back.

10. Keeping your arms out in front of you, slowly bend forward reaching toward the floor. Keep your knees slightly bent and only reach as far down as you can. This is stretching the back of your thighs – known as the hamstrings. Remember, only bend forward as far as is comfortable.

11. Slowly rise back up and extend your right leg in front of you, with your right heel on the floor and toes in the air. Keep your back straight as you bend forward at the hips until you feel a stretch in your calf muscle. Repeat this with the left leg.

12. Repeat this same series of movements one or two more times. Take notice of how you feel. Is this something you would want to incorporate into your everyday routine?
Flexibility Quiz

Now that we’re all loose and relaxed let’s learn more about why the series of stretches we just did is important. It’s time to stretch our flexibility knowledge with a quiz! We will quiz what you already know, and teach you some new things as well.

(read each question aloud, wait for a response, then read the answer)

Is it best to warm up before or after stretching?
Before. It is essential to warm up prior to stretching or any other physical activity. A good warm-up can include a brisk walk or even marching in place.

Which of the following techniques should be followed when stretching?
A. Holding the stretch for 10-30 seconds.
B. When the initial muscle tension subsides, stretch slightly further but never to the point of pain.
C. Stretch all major muscle groups: front of thighs (quadriceps), back of thighs (hamstrings), hip flexors, calf muscles, chest, and upper back.
D. Breathe deeply during a stretch.
E. All of the above.

The correct answer is E. All of these activities are important to stretch the entire body well.

True or false? Stretching prevents injury.
False. Research has not found that stretching prevents injury. However, habitual stretching done over a period of time can help to reduce your risk of injury.

True or false? “Bouncing” into a stretch is best if you are new to stretching.
False. Most experts agree that “bouncing” into a stretch, known as ballistic stretching, increases the risk of injury. Instead, perform static stretching, which is simply holding a stretch without bouncing.

When is the best time to stretch?
A. After a brisk walk or jog.
B. As part of a cool-down following an aerobic workout.

The correct answer is D. All are correct because the muscles are warmed up and more pliable after exercise.

What percentage of your flexibility can you lose for every 10 years you are inactive?
10%. Muscles tend to lose elasticity with age and inactivity, yet regular stretching helps keep your muscles loose and your body mobile. That is why it is especially important to stay active and stretch regularly as we age. If you don’t use it, you’ll lose it!

True or False? Regular stretching may make muscles stronger.
True. A study from the Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine found that stretching regularly may make your muscles stronger. Participants involved in this study found that performing regular hamstring stretches not only increased their range of motion, it also strengthened their leg muscles.

Flexibility is more than just stretching

Perhaps you are familiar with other forms of stretching. Let’s discuss how yoga and tai chi incorporate stretching in their forms.

If the word yoga invokes images of complicated contortions and twists, you should know there’s more to it than that. Yoga combines elements of fitness with a soothing sense of well-being. Its gentle postures encourage flexibility and strength. Its emphasis on proper breathing and mind-centering promote stress reduction. There are different types of yoga, varying in their degree of difficulty, all using combinations of breathing, posture and exercise. The physical exercises, or postures, are called asanas. There’s even a type of yoga, known as Bikram yoga, that is practiced in a 95 to 100 degree room! If you are brand-new to yoga, however, don’t sweat it. There are plenty of simple, beginner-level poses you may start with.

Ready to try a simple yoga pose right now? Stand up and keep your feet slightly apart.

(wait for members to stand, then read the following description)
Bring your arms out to the side then up over your head. Press your palms together, keep your arms straight and gaze up toward your thumbs. Be sure to keep your back straight. You’ve just done the “raised hands pose” or “Urdhva Hastasana” – this is much easier to perform than pronounce!

Tai chi, a martial art, consists of a series of slow, controlled, dance-like movements called forms. This discipline has been practiced for thousands of years, and has become a popular form of exercise for all ages. People who practice it report that it’s relaxing and refreshing – that’s reason enough to try it! In fact, tai chi is often referred to as “meditation in motion” because it promotes a sense of calm. The careful, graceful movements of tai chi also improve flexibility, posture, coordination and balance. Research has even found that tai chi helps lower blood pressure in older adults. Good for the mind and good for the body!

### Tips for Safe Stretching

If you’d like to start off with some basic stretches to increase flexibility, keep the following tips in mind:

**Warm-up** – If you are stretching prior to exercising, warm up first with light movement for five to ten minutes. Never stretch cold muscles, as this increases risk of injury.

**Start slowly** – Ease into the stretch gently and slowly. Begin holding a stretch for around ten seconds, and release. Gradually work your way up to 30 seconds. When the initial muscle tension subsides you may stretch a little further for up to 60 seconds.

**Breathe** – You may be tempted to hold your breath during a stretch but, instead, take deep relaxed breaths.

**Keep up with it** – Aim to stretch three times a week, or as part of your typical exercise routine.

**Listen to your body** – If a certain stretch hurts or just doesn’t feel right, do not do it. Also, remember that every body is different and stretching, as with any activity, will become easier with practice.

**Enjoy** – Take notice of how your body feels after a nice, relaxing stretch. Let the tension melt away!

### Flexibility Goal

In addition to cardio and strength activities, be sure to include some type of flexibility training this week as part of a well-rounded fitness routine. Let’s all set a goal for this week that we may briefly review at the beginning of next week’s meeting. You may choose one of the goals listed below or create one of your own. We may not all be yoga instructors, but we can all reap the benefits of improved flexibility!

- I will perform the series of stretches listed in the beginning of this program, at least 3 times this week.
- I will try an activity to help improve flexibility, such as yoga, tai chi, pilates, or swimming.
- I will perform simple leg stretches (calves, quadriceps, hamstrings) after my cardiovascular activity this week.
- Other: my own flexibility goal is

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