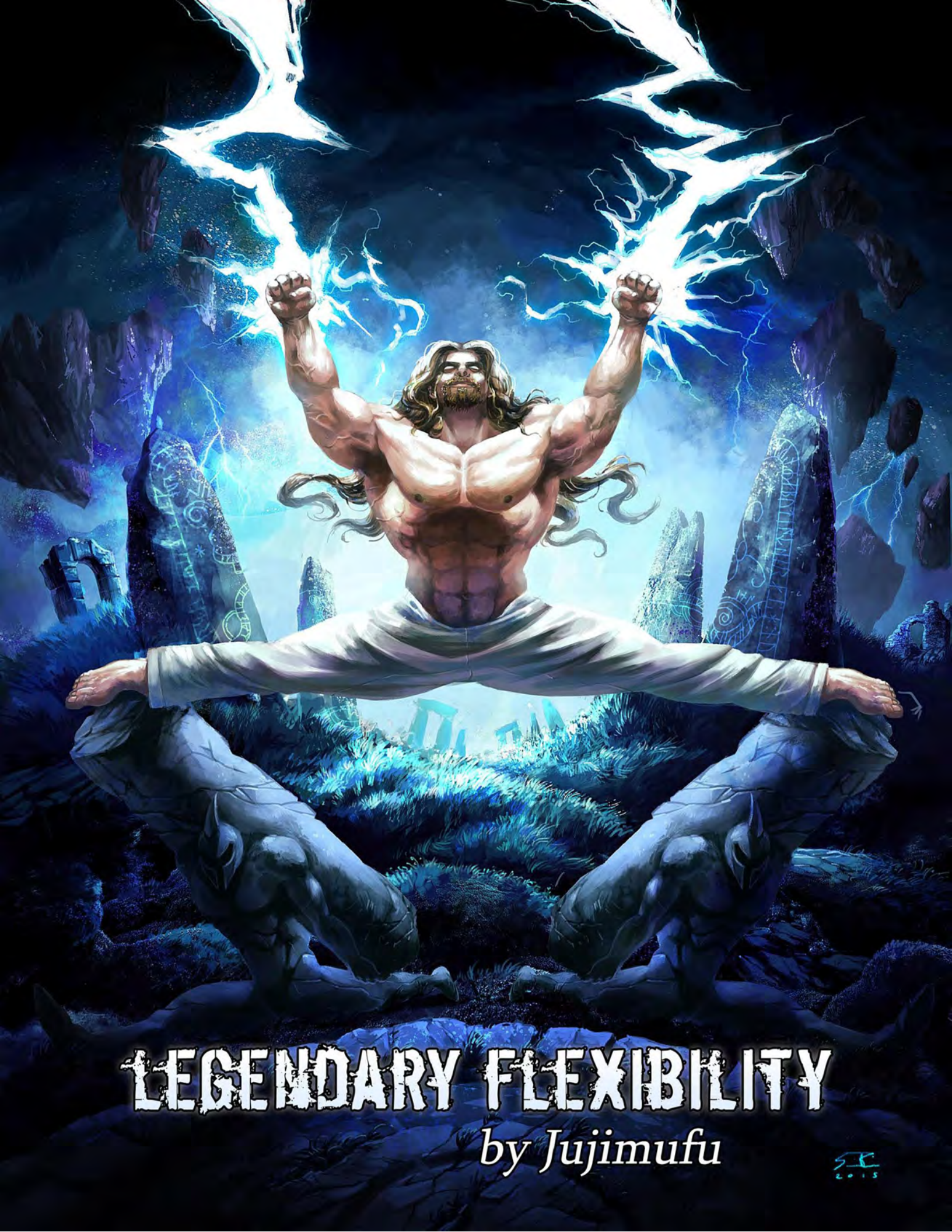
LEGENDARY FLEXIBILITY
by Jujimufu

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HELLO,
WELCOME TO LEGENDARY FLEXIBILITY

I'm Jujimufu, the anabolic acrobat. I bodybuild, powerlift and train acrobatics through an activity called martial arts tricking. I've been training flexibility for 16 years now. During which, I've developed unique perspectives on flexibility development methodology through my crossed training disciplines.

Let me give you a peek into my perspective... When was the last time somebody told you to take phenibut, drink coffee, blast loud music and sniff an ammonia inhalant while training for the splits? When was the last time you had the mental image of someone preparing for a side split with the same focus as someone preparing for a 1000+ lb. squat? When was the last time someone told you that you needed a gym bag just for flexibility equipment? Nobody thinks of flexibility these ways. Why? Because those things are crazy? Right? Isn't flexibility training supposed to be like yoga? NO! This book is filled with crazy things, flexibility common sense that's never been spoken of, and weird secrets you won't find anywhere else. It's time for you to learn what it means to work toward legendary flexibility. Enjoy!

PART 1
KEY STEPS TO LEGENDARY FLEXIBILITY

STEP 1: Live the flexibility lifestyle

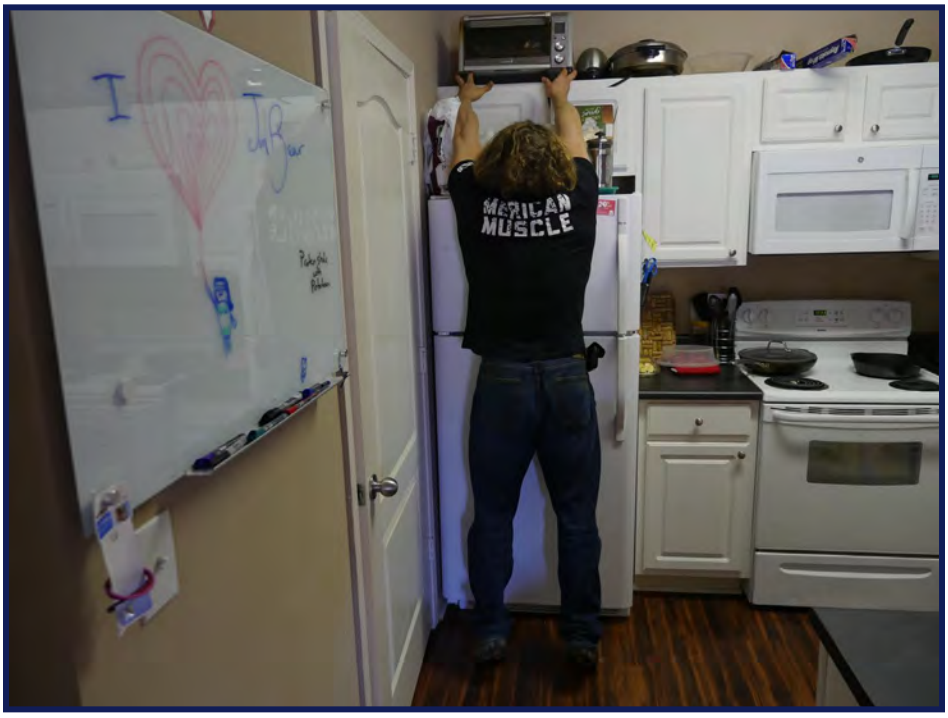
The most important step you can take toward legendary flexibility development is to move into and out of the most stable, full range of motion positions possible, every time you move. Let's start in the kitchen by getting the rice cooker out of the bottom cupboard.

Retrieving the baking pan, notice how I push the knees out in this squat?

Cossack stretch to get something from underneath the sink.

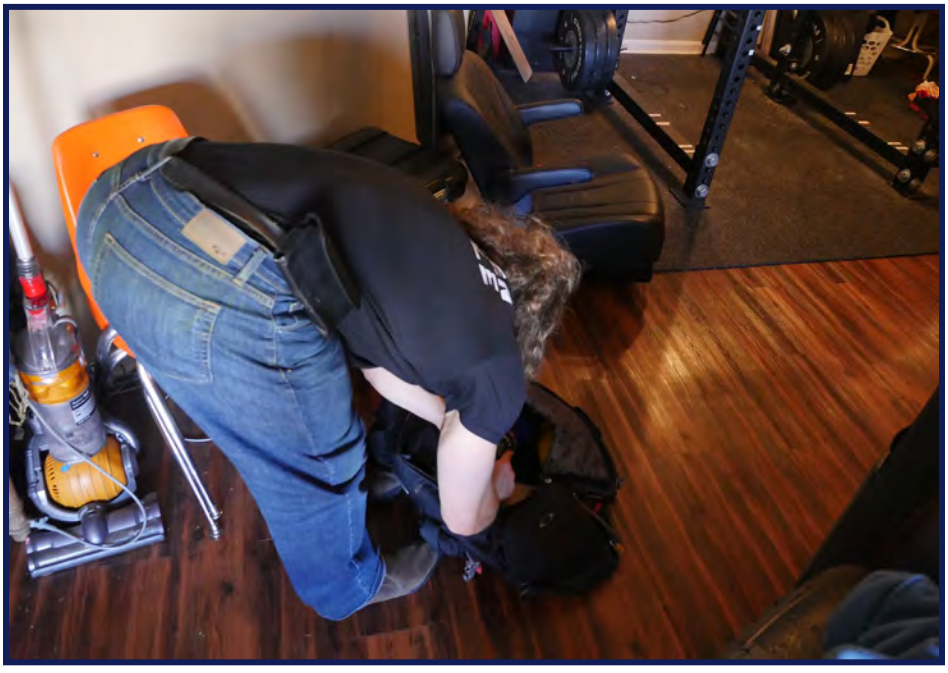
A different angle of the under-the-sink cossack stretch.

REACH! ON THE TIPTOES! STRETCH! FEEL THAT BACK STRETCH!



Washing a dish, so stand tall, push the hips out by flexing the glutes (like thrusting your crotch into the sink). I call this the power stance. It's a good way to get a slight stretch when standing in one spot.

Big hamstring stretch while getting something out of a bag on the floor. Bend at the hips, not the back.



Oops. Dropped these funny cards. Time to squat again!

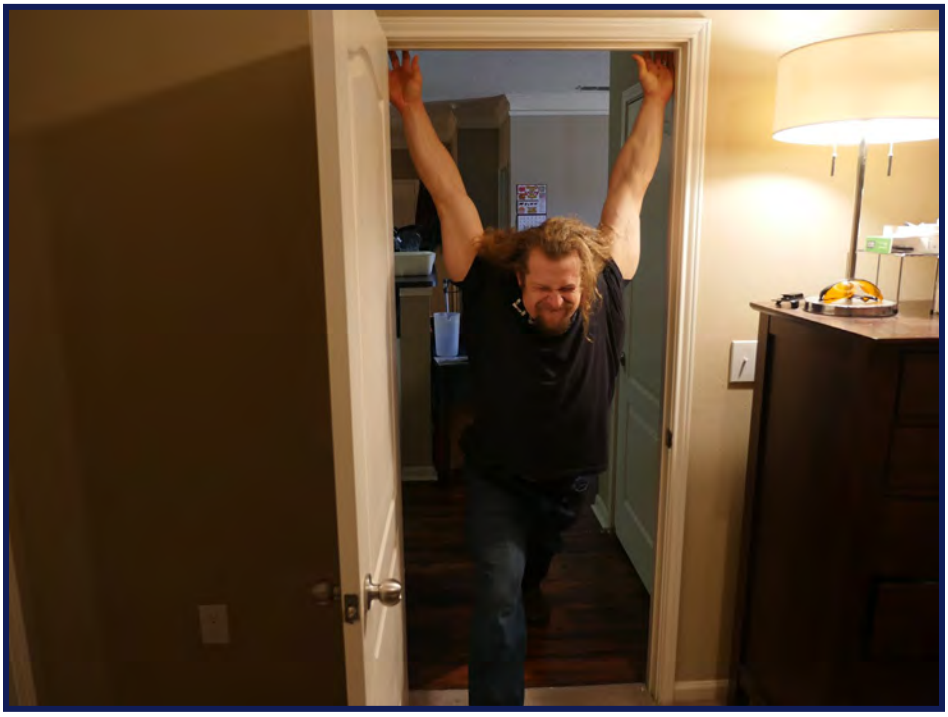
Sitting. Talking on the phone. Stretching a glute.

"Come on… I've been on hold for like… almost 10 minutes!
(And holding this stretch for 10 minutes!)"

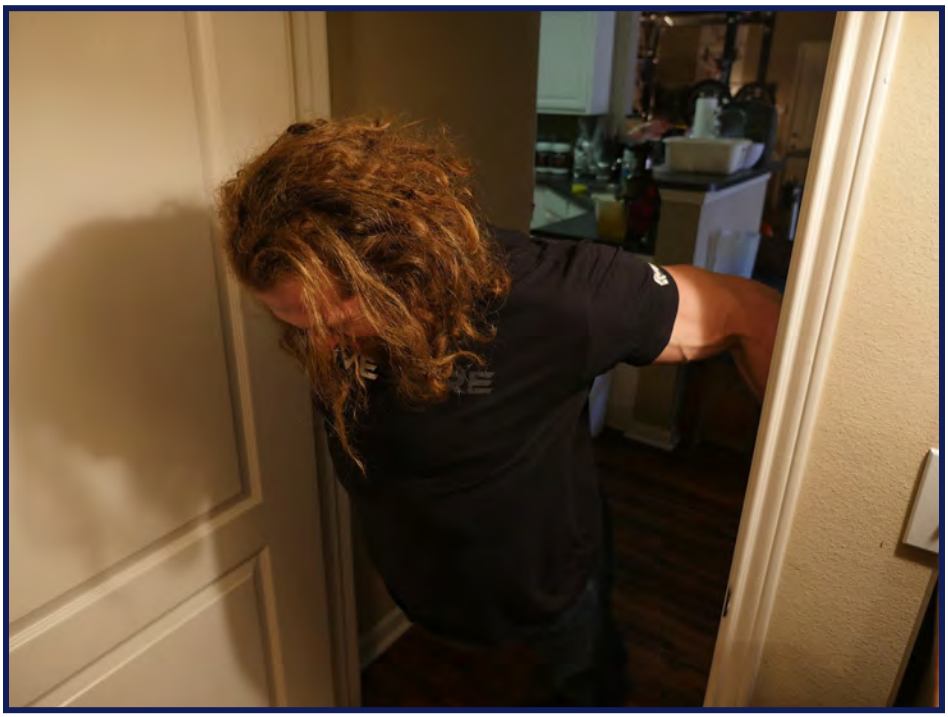
Clipping my toenails in a glute stretch.

Ankle mobility? No problem, you can do it just standing in place: anywhere, anytime.

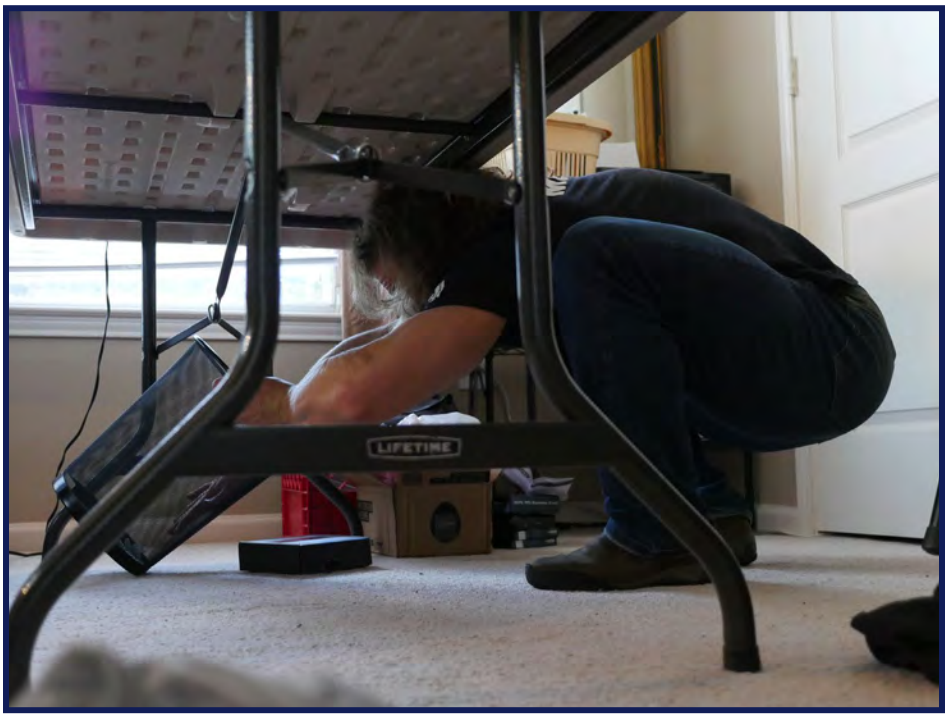
Just passing through and doing a shoulder and upper back stretch using the doorway!



Door frame pec stretch too. Gotta loosen up my pecs, they're tight from bench pressing!



"Okay so I didn't throw it in the trash. So… Come on, where is it?!"



You need to move like this everywhere, and all the time. There are plenty of flexible people out there who never spend time stretching or even training. They don't do a single, manual corrective exercise for mobility problems (crossfit style self massage), they just do things throughout their days in flexible ways and they don't sit on their ass 12 hours a day. They are sneaking in stretches all the time in useful ways! They live a flexibility lifestyle! Jeez. Talk about functional flexibility training! Look, even kids naturally do this kinda stuff. Check out my nephew:

You also need to get rid of all your restrictive clothing. If you can't squat all the way down, kick up with maximum height, or even do the splits in whatever pants or shorts you're wearing, then get rid of them! Do you think the martial arts heroes of yesteryear wore super tight skinny jeans and business clothing? Get out! They wore funny pants and funny shoes and they trained in big mountains for 8 hours every morning (because the entire day was morning to them).

Restrictive clothing generally discourages moving correctly through stable, full ranges of motion, while encouraging terrible movement patterns that set you up for a destiny of mediocrity and pure suffering. Ever walked around in restrictive clothing for a whole day when you weren't used to them, such as at a business trade show? You feel absolutely terrible at the end of the day!

Sure we're smiling, but we feel awful in these suits!

Some people have to live this way everyday! If you don't have to, don't! Exchanging your restrictive clothing for full range of motion alternatives is a direct investment in your flexibility gains!

These swim shorts were the worst shorts I've ever owned! Swim shorts like these can be deceivingly restrictive. I felt them fight back every kick, jump, or trick I ever did. I should have never bought them. I should not have kept wearing them. I just liked the way they looked! But I was ignorant. I didn't read the book you're reading now, but you ARE reading this, so I am telling you: THROW AWAY YOUR RESTRICTIVE CLOTHING!

Wear pants or shorts that allow full freedom of movement. This is most commonly difficult at socially normal situations outside of fitness settings: work, school, or professional. But it can be done, and it must be done one item at a time. Let's start with jeans.

Jeans are more socially acceptable than fitness wear in non-fitness settings (at least in the United States), but they can be restrictive. Fortunately, there are jeans out there made for full freedom of movement. They are usually cut to a shape that facilitates movement, and blended with something like 2% spandex to make the fabric stretch. They don't look different or feel different than normal denim, except they are magically loose.

These are Fran Denim Jeans with a 98% cotton 2% spandex mix, cut and shaped to allow full range of movement. When I first tried on a pair, my life was changed. Knowing that this would be something I would wear everyday and swear by, I asked them to pay me because I was going tell the world about their product. Of course they said yes, because I can do amazing stuff in their jeans!

Not only are ass to grass squats possible in these jeans, but these jeans also have a mild, helpful "compression" (not restriction) at the full range of motion. They seriously feel good to lift in!

So yeah, you can do ass to grass squats, splits, kicks, anything you want in them. They even hold up when soaking wet during these movements. (When jeans are wet, they are at a greater risk of getting torn because they stick more to the skin. This sticking doesn't allow them to move well on your legs.)

I highly recommend investing in a pair of these if you wear jeans regularly. It will help your flexibility out tremendously. Purchase a pair through my website where I resell them: www.acrobolix.com/jeans … Everyone that has bought a pair through me has sent me a great deal of gratitude for exposing them to this miracle of a product.

Now, jeans may not be acceptable for your needs though. Maybe you are required to wear formal clothes for your job. I'm sorry I have no product recommendations, but I would recommend at least doing this: go to a thrift store and explore. Thrift stores often have quite a spread of different business wears, and you can find a good, loose pair for cheap. When you go to try them on, lift up your knees and squat in the dressing room. Test their range of motion. Find a pair that allows full freedom of movement. I've found a pair at a thrift store for $7 that withstood this chair split (barely, but still not bad for dress pants and considering my big legs and butt)!

Aside from pants, tucked in shirts that come with formal clothes are also your enemy. When you reach overhead, a corner of the shirt likely comes untucked, or the shirt puffs out making your shirt tuck look like a crumpled muffin.

This "untucking" is so annoying that you may find a tendency to avoid reaching overhead. This avoidance to reach overhead is to your upper body what sitting is to your ass and legs (for prolonged periods of time, the musculature becomes glued, and that is very bad)! So what you must do is this:

1. Recognize this is happening.

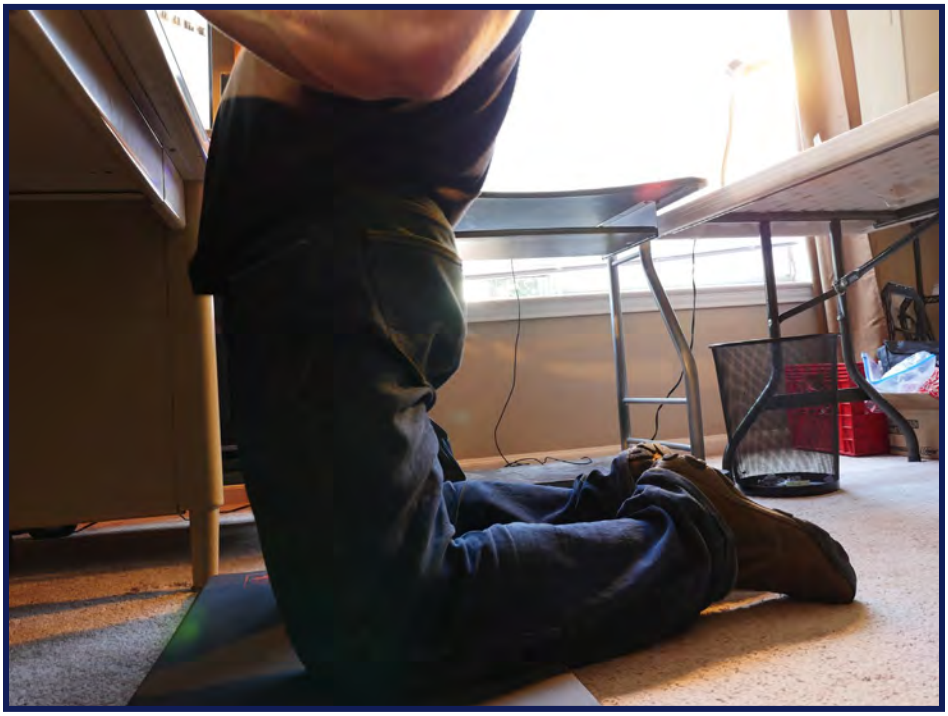
2. Take breaks to untuck your shirt, stretch overhead, move your upper body, and tuck your shirt back in every half hour to hour.

That's it. I just made you aware of it, so now you have to do it.

Yes, I do have a triple monitor setup! Anyway, I do a lot of work on my computer at home. Not only do I have a job where I actually do "work from home" for 50% of my work time, but I'm also working on my own projects. Writing an eBook takes lots of time, so does editing videos, and so does answering the gigantic mountain of emails I get daily. I do a lot of computer work, and so that means sitting a lot.

Since sitting too long is bad, I alternate between that and kneeling on a pad.

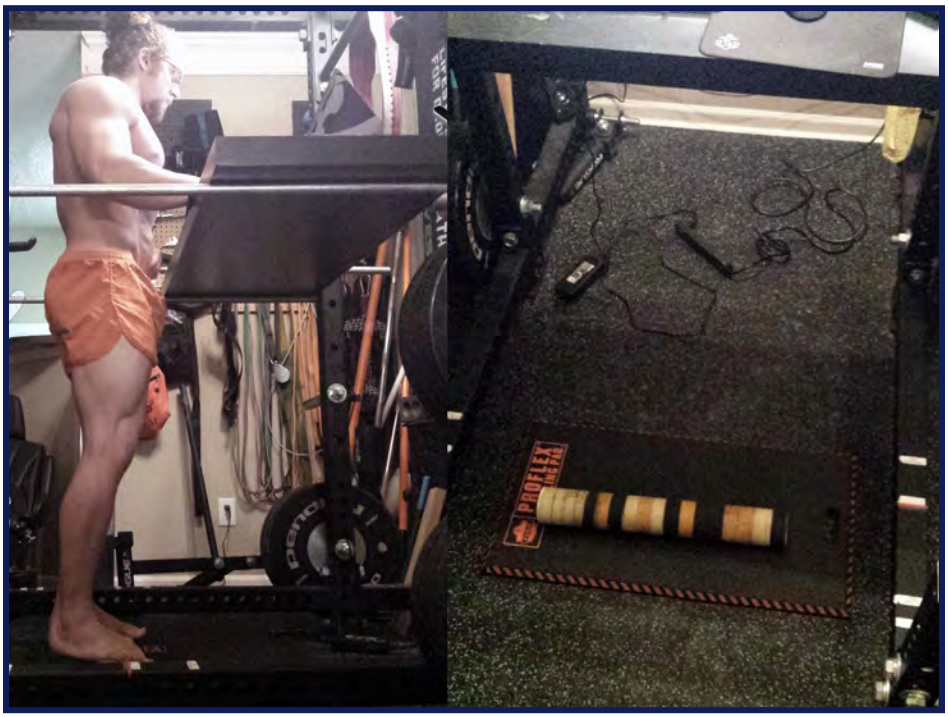
When I kneel on this pad, I can push my hips forward. This stretches them and gets some glute activation in the mix. This also changes the pressure characteristic on my spine.



I use the PROFLEX KNEELING PAD. It's made for mechanics or construction workers who work on their knees on really hard ground all day long. It wasn't cheap, but it's super comfortable and was worth every penny. (I do some exercises on it too.)

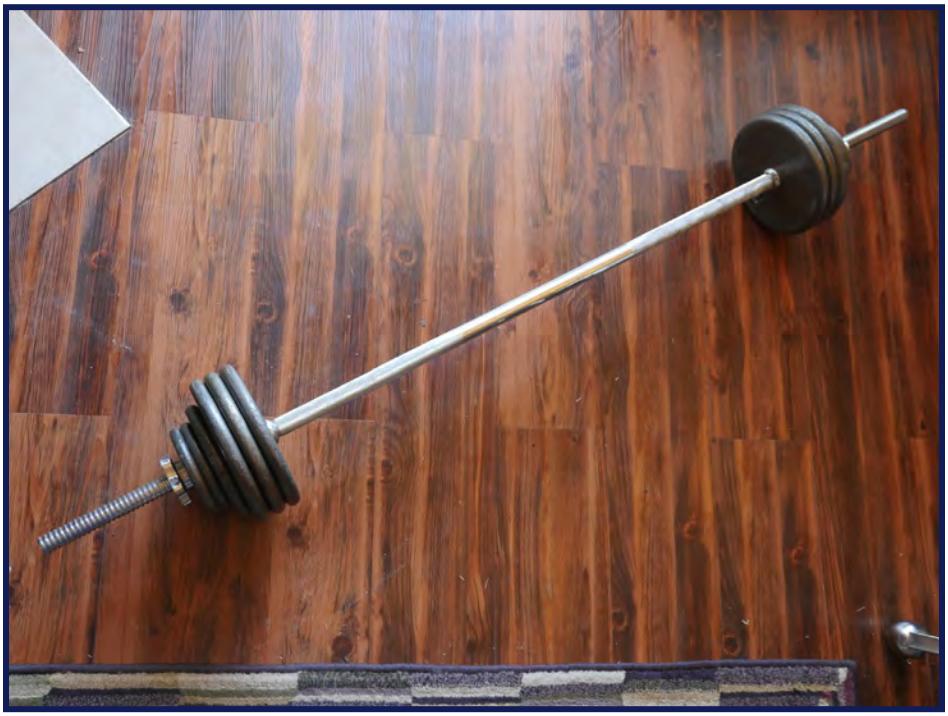
You can also make a simple standing desk with a piano keyboard stand, a piece of wood, and a wireless keyboard and mouse. However, there are now fancy standing work stations available too. With that noted, it's important to remember that none of these positions are good independent of the others. The human body must flex and stretch! Utilizing all of these positions is best. Standing too long is bad, just ask a cashier, who stands all day, how their lower back feels!

To break up the monotony of standing in one place, try standing on a PVC pipe. You can roll around on it while also loosening up the fascia on the bottom of the feet (if barefoot), which is one of the greatest methods of developing a resistance to ankle sprain accidents. Stand on it.



Yes I am indeed using the squat rack in my apartment as a makeshift standing desk as I stand and roll about on my striped PVC pipe, and type this sentence, all while poking about in my tiny, orange track shorts! My life is good.

Anyway, you still gotta take a break from standing no matter what gimmick you come up with to extend your standing time. You can get stuck and stiffened in any position. So no matter what you plan to do, and especially if you plan to just sit because of job restrictions, get up at regular intervals to move around and make that movement count. As you walk around, flex and stretch your strides. Yes, you can even walk in a way that stimulates flexibility! But don't just walk around, do some squatting motions too! When I was in my early twenties, I kept a cheap-o mini barbell in my room, along with some small plates. It weighed 95 lbs (43 kilograms) fully loaded. Actually, I still have it. See the picture:

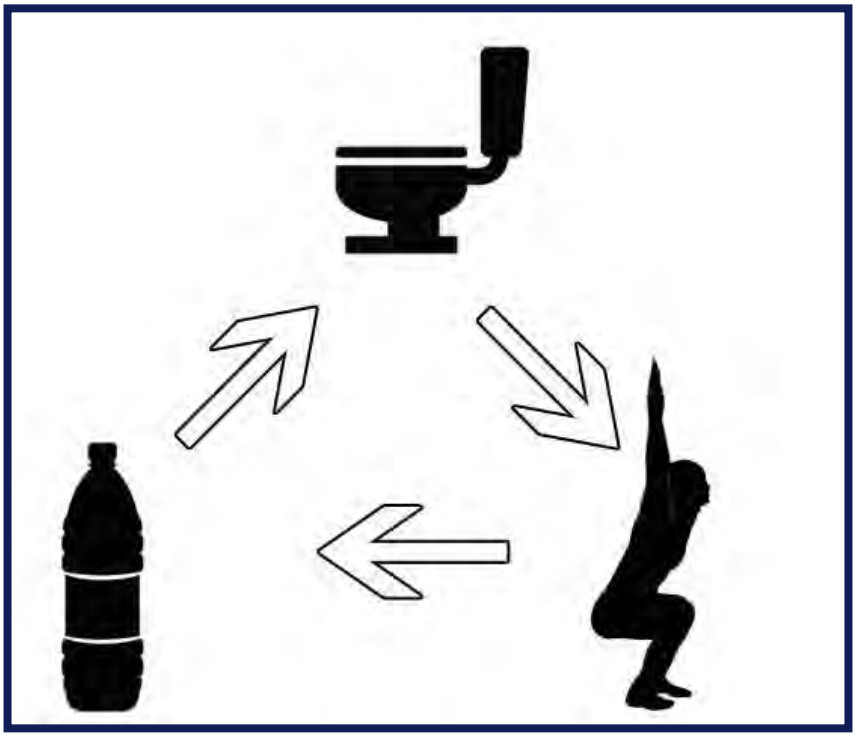


I used to do front squats with it for blood flow and to practice the technique a few moments during the day. I used to sit in the bottom of the position to stretch my body. The full front squat with an Olympic grip is a super stretch: hitting the wrists, upper back, legs, and ankles.

Since I installed a beefy power rack in my dining room a couple years ago, every time I pass by it, I do exercises such as: back squats, hangs, pull ups, or whatever. This wakes me up and makes me feel alive! This helps my flexibility tremendously (not to mention my strength, health, and well being.)

Speaking of hanging, it's a really good habit to get into for spine health.

When I'm at work, I keep a dumbbell in my bathroom so I can do overhead squats with it whenever I want. (Indeed, I have my own office with my own bathroom. I'm so lucky.) I even made a routine out of it which I call the Pee Squat Drink routine! You can read more about that routine in the Ass to grass squats routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs.



Basically you drink roughly half a liter of water, go pee, do overhead squats, then repeat. You think I'm nuts for squatting in my bathroom with a dumbbell? Well, I am. So what? Sometimes you have to do nutty things to build your body and skillsets. You want average results? Do average things. You want to be better than average? Then squatting ass to grass in the bathroom every time you pee is one way to get better than average results!

When I lounge around at night with my wife, I often wear a product called Yoga Toes that spreads and stretches my toes. Yes, you should even stretch your toes! Especially if you do any form of jumping in your training.

I also leave a 2nd pair of yoga toes in my car for long drives!

I've made it as convenient as possible to work a stretch here and there, and thus stay flexible by setting booby traps all over my places. Because of all of these things, flexibility has become automatic for me, it's become a lifestyle.

All of this movement increases blood flow, primes and maintains optimal movement patterns, and stretches me. Altogether, these things are not only healthy, they are essential for effortless development and maintenance of my overall flexibility!

So start by meticulously organizing your environments and behaviors to encourage flexibility, then consciously cultivate and practice correct, full range of motion movements everyday in little ways. Begin living a flexibility lifestyle, that's one of my biggest secrets to becoming and remaining flexible: stop wearing restrictive clothing, leave reminders everywhere you go to stretch, stop being still and stifled, and get up and move! Squat down, deep: in the kitchen, in the bathroom, out in the world! Reach, extend, outward, into the furthest, most legendary ranges of motion! Stretch where you've never gone before, and stretch where you've never stretched before, including your bathroom!

STEP 2: Create your flexibility story

If you want to reach the highest levels of flexibility, you need a story defined by a great moment of flexibility that will change your life.

In the movie Bloodsport, Jean-Claude Van Damme, who plays the role of Frank Dux, masters his suspended side split because he's motivated to avenge his friend's death. Frank viewed side split as a crucial skill he needs to get revenge on his friend's killer in bloodsport combat.Therefore, he trains it on rooftops and stuff. In real life, Jean associated side split as a movie stunt that would pay him tons of $ and immortalize him on film media. The $ and fame were great motivators for Jean to train the side split.

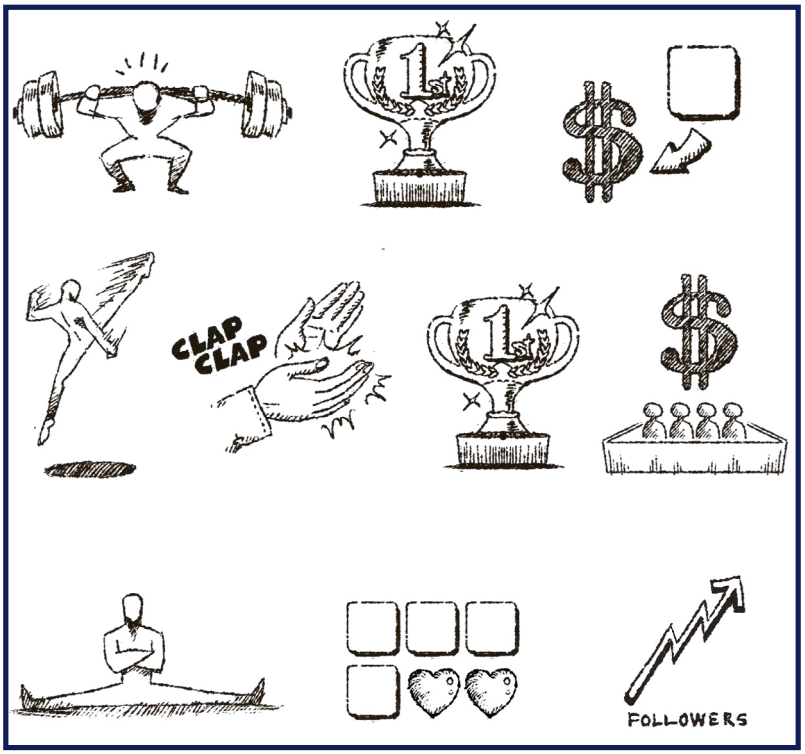
Jean claude Van Damme sur le tournage de JCVD en octobre 2007 by Michaël Bemelmans (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

I created my own flexibility story twice. The first time was when I was 15 years old. I wanted to win 1st place in my Taekwondo federation's free-style kata competitions. I thought that getting a side split would set me apart from the other competitors because nobody else was doing them, so I associated side split with winning. I trained my splits like a psycho every night in my bedroom for 2 hours while watching anime cartoons on VHS tapes. I got the full front splits and side splits in 2 months. Then I did them at competitions, and I was right, that stunt got me crap loads of 1st place wins and respect from my peers for years.

In recent years I'm doing weighted chair splits. Why? I wanted to be the first person to do them in the way I had imagined: with barbells, weighted neck harnesses, and other stuff. These imaginations haunted me with the thought, "what if someone else thinks of these ideas too, and beats me to them?!" I worked up to them quickly so I could be the first person to do them. I didn't want people stealing my ideas! Chasing these stunts changed my life. I was only expecting some more Instagram followers and increased interest in this eBook you're currently reading. What I created was a viral video that changed my life trajectory.

Jean-Claude Van Damme and myself both integrated flexibility into who we are. We both became "flexibility guys"… Follow our examples and create a great moment for YOUR OWN flexibility that will change your life. Whether your moment is something directly related to flexibility (splits) or something supported by flexibility (increased athletic performance). If you don't figure out exactly how flexibility is going to fit into your story, you won't work on it! What's the reward going to be?

Speaking from observation and experience, staying motivated to train flexibility can be hard because the external rewards are not as everyday-obvious as say, bodybuilding or tricking. If you build some muscle, you get respect everywhere you go. People move out of your way and cashiers smile at you. If you learn to do flips, bystanders look upon you like you're a fearless, daredevil magician. But flexibility? Not usually so. Whether you admit it or not, intrinsic reward is weak in-itself. It's not enough, so you need to be training flexibility for some external gain: social currency, opportunity, $, 1st place trophies, followers, just something! Even if flexibility itself does not directly lead to these external gains, it needs to be a step in a sequence of things that leads to those gains.



What's the story behind the great moment of flexibility you will strive for, and how will it change your life?

STEP 3: Brute Force 1000 reps

Attack the kind of flexibility you want directly with brute force.

- Ass to grass squats? Do 1000 squats total, trying to go ass to grass each rep.
- Full splits? Spend 1000 minutes total in the uncomfortable end range.
- Higher kicks? Do 1000 lower kicks. They'll eventually become higher.
- Wrist flexibility to do Olympic grip style front squats? Unrack the weight and stand there with the bar stretching your wrists for 1000 minutes total.
- Flexibility for tricking? Do 1000 reps of any flexibility elements of the tricks you want. Stretch kicks for kick tricks. Stretch side bends for bending tricks.

Get working on whatever it is you want, right now. I don't care if you can only stretch kick to your waist, start kicking. I don't care if your knees are so bent when you practice front splits that fat basset hounds can lay underneath you! Start splitting!

The biggest mistake I see experienced athletes make when working towards improving their flexibility is avoiding this hard, direct work, and instead waste their time doing a circus of banded-massage-rolling-stick-voodoo-floss nonsense.

The modern mobility wizards, using their advanced vocabulary, confuse us with an orgy of "tactical" exercises guaranteed to restore ranges of functional motion. Now, those things have their place and have changed the entire training game for the better, but you can't restore a range of motion that you've never developed. We are not entitled to any range of motion. The highest ranges of motion are not "natural" endowments of our species that we've lost because of our modern lifestyle which is characterized by sitting and skinny jeans. The highest ranges of motion demand a lot of very hard, direct work. Jabbing your muscles with a stick or ball or wrapping yourself up like a mummy in rubber and squirming around to "restore gliding surfaces" is decent as supplemental corrective therapy. However, it isn't the golden ticket to getting and maintaining any "decent" level of flexibility you may want. 1000 reps or minutes of brute forced effort is the golden ticket to getting and maintaining the flexibility you want.

Look, here's a confession: I did a total of maybe 6 hours of this type of tactical "mobility" work the entire past year. That means rolling around on lacrosse balls and using sticks to massage myself. 6 hours, that's all? Shouldn't I feel like garbage? I mean, I do way more dangerous stuff than your average 230 lb (105 kg) guy or your average cross trainer... And I'm 30 years old and have been doing this crap for 16 years primarily outside. Shouldn't my body be beat to all hell and back? Flips on a rocky, rubbly dirt road in cooler winter weather? Bring it!

My knees haven't exploded, my back feels incredibly good, and my movement patterns are pretty close to perfect. Why? Because direct work wins every single time. I live the flexibility lifestyle. And, first and foremost, every time I train, whatever the movement, I do it through a full range of motion. So if your training begins to look mostly like the things you see in a physical therapy office, you're going down the wrong path, you're getting confused. Stop beating around the bush and procrastinating from the direct, hard work necessary to unlock that flexibility you want. Stretch deep! Kick high! Bend and twist around, all the way around until you grimace from the stretch.

The second biggest mistake I see athletes make when working towards improving their flexibility in a movement or position is this: exchanging their hard work for the same circus of goofy exercises when they plateau in their flexibility training! Look, those things are almost exclusively medicinal supplements, not staples. If your training is constantly hurting you so that you desperately need this type of work, then you're not training intelligently or moving correctly. Your staples will always be your full range of motion movement patterns. If done correctly and everyday, those are the most protective, therapeutic, and effective means of restoring, maintaining, and building your ranges of motion.

So keep the hard work up when you're close to your final destination. For me, when getting the splits, the last 4 inches (10 cm) was a bitch! It only took me a month to get that far, and another 6 weeks to finish those last 4 inches. It doesn't get easier as you get closer. It gets easier when you get there. Keep training hard and stay direct. Train your flexibility as hard as you train anything else. Get aggressive with the direct, simplified approach. Don't be confused or fooled, there is no trick to this, it's really hard work. It hurts like hell, and you gotta keep the really hard work up and push through the pain thresholds if you want to finally reach those really awesome ranges of motion.

Going off a bit to the side here, let's talk about hip pain in the side splits. A lot of people complain about their hip flexors in the side splits as if this is dysfunctional or genetic. They plateau near the bottom and can't go further, so they misuse the word "impingement". After which, they quote things about bone deformity, blame their hip structure, their genetics, and blah blah blah. For everyone I've ever known who has described this problem (which is everyone who has ever worked close to a full side splits), they just weren't training enough, or were afraid this discomfort was not normal and wussed out.

Quick side split test. If you can do this with your left leg.

And your right leg.

Then you can do it with both legs.

And no, if you do it with both legs at the same time you won't begin growing a third leg like in this photoshopped picture. And if you're a guy, your man reproductive parts just dangle, they don't begin splitting apart with your legs. All those comments about it hurting your balls or whatever are just anatomical misunderstandings. I shouldn't have to say any of that though, because most people reading this book are intelligent enough to know that the balls aren't actually glued to your groin muscles, but whatever.

So what's holding you back from just doing this split with both legs at the same time? The same things holding you back from doing any skill that you are suitably fit for: familiarity with the technique, and control (strength and coordination). Much of this is nervous system training: you're training your brain and its numerous periphery branches to fire and adapt to this position. That takes time, that takes effort, and that takes getting accustomed to pain. The body doesn't want to adapt to this position because it's weird, so it sends pain signals to warn you to stop wasting your time training for something so weird. But you've just read Part I, Step 2: Create your flexibility story. so you know something your brain doesn't know: the reward for working through the pain of achieving this position and many other feats of flexibility.

So the pain in the side splits in the hips: I experienced this same pain, I still do even at my level of development! I worked until I got familiar with it. It's normal that it hurts like crazy, and the hurt comes back if I'm not training the side splits frequently enough. However, you get used to its presence if you keep training and it will hurt a little less the more you do it. You must accept that it does hurt in a unique way and it's okay.

Proper technique? Looking for some instruction on how to execute flexibility exercises correctly? Don't bother, it's not that hard. Look, back in 2000, I learned ALL of my acrobatics by pause playing downloaded .mpeg files at 320x240 resolution on my PC, way before streaming video and YouTube. I just smacked spacebar tons of time to make the video play and stop while the guy did some acrobatic trick, then I ran in my backyard and emulated. I was a stupid 14 year old kid. If I can do that for acrobatic tricks at that age, you can do that for any embarrassingly simplistic flexibility exercise that you can google image search, or view in this book. Don't be helpless: monkey see monkey do whatever the exercise or stretch looks like. If you're doing it wrong, you'll probably suspect it, check it, fix it, and/or autocorrect quickly. Trust me, you'll see that you aren't so stupid that you cannot do this yourself.

Progressive exercises? Intra-training strategy? Programming? I'm gonna give you a goldmine of secrets and super strategies in Part II of this book. It'll make the time you spend working on flexibility really count. But from the start, which is right now, you have to accept that hard, direct, PAINFUL, and often BORING work is the only way to ever make it in the flexibility game. Brute force it.

Overkill? Overtraining? Overflexibility? Don't worry about these things. Your body gives you lots of feedback, you're smart enough to know the difference between good pain and bad. You're smart enough to understand this chapter's message and to take it as literally as I intended while knowing your own limits. Don't play dumb. Jujimufu said start working on your flexibility goals directly, no matter how far you're off from them right now. He didn't say to tear your body apart or do something stupid like having someone jump on your back while you're doing a pancake groin stretch. If you hurt yourself, then you're not paying attention or you're not being patient. Don't force it, work it. It takes time. Take your time, make the time, put in lots of time. Stop trying to brain your flexibility work before you even start. Do 1000 reps. 1000 minutes worth of time deepening your splits or squats, or increasing your kicks. Whatever it is you want, begin brute forcing it now.

[BECOME LEGENDARY CHALLENGE]

Remember the legends of the martial arts? Jackie Chan, Bruce Lee, and Shaolin monks that barely made it out of the Orient in those old movies. Guys that possessed legendary flexibility. What did they do? Do you think they rolled around on lacrosse balls and cylindrical objects to master their flexibility? New training techniques aren't necessarily bad, but ask yourself whether or not you're seeking new techniques to avoid the hard, direct work on the things that have worked for centuries? And, do you think for a moment when they sat in the splits for hours that they even once worried about being overflexible? How much time do you think they spent in those positions? I'm betting a lot. They wanted it, badly… do you? Ask yourself these questions to challenge your own notions of what a lot of flexibility work really looks like.

STEP 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises

There are 4 rules you must follow when choosing flexibility exercises for your goals.

RULE 1. SELECT EXERCISES THAT RESEMBLE YOUR GOAL'S POSITION OR MOVEMENT.

Let's talk about the aerial: a tricking move that makes use of a large range of motion.

This example is great because it reveals the missing link for developing flexibility for certain kinds of skill: volume. There are only so many reps of an aerial we can do before we get tired. There is also the possibility that you cannot aerial, and your lack of flexibility in the movement is holding you back! To increase range of motion in the aerial we must deconstruct it into its elements, then hammer them.

1000 cartwheels.

1000 back lifts.

1000 side bend variations.

And probably some splits training. Aerials love splits. Get to work. That aerial isn't going to land itself.

Speaking of the splits, it too is a complex position consisting of several components. For example, the basic two positions to work when training the front splits are warrior lunge variations and hamstring dominant variations.

To a certain degree, most complex positions and movements can only be done so many times before technique or will power begin to fail. To get the extra volume needed for a really good training effect, these complex positions and movements can be broken down into prerequisite elements that can be repped for a beneficial higher volume without the emotional fatigue.

RULE 2. ALWAYS MAINTAIN FULL CONTROL IN YOUR FLEXIBILITY EXERCISES.

Don't ever force yourself into positions, always remain in control. That fictional thing about martial arts masters or sumo wrestlers being forced at a young age into the splits, tearing their muscles, so they heal back super limber? Really? That's nonsense.

Sumo Wrestling By John Paul Antes (Own work)
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Throw thoughts like that out of your head if they've ever been there. Those guys are flexible because they stretch (or stretched) a lot, not because one time in their life they were forced into a split that became permanent. Look, just run a google image search for "Sumo Wrestlers stretching", look at all the pictures you can find of Sumo Wrestlers stretching! If it was common for them to be forced into the splits at a young age, making their splits permanent, then why do they continue stretching daily as grown ass men? COME ON PEOPLE! THINK!!! LOGIC!!!

Anyway, forced stretching without control has the nickname ballistic stretching. It looks like violent bouncing. Bouncing stretches are great, as long as they are not forced beyond the point of maintaining control. In fact, continually moving into and out of positions with resistance is one of the big keys to great flexibility. It's so important, that there is a trend now where people refer to this as "mobility" (movement flexibility) and have begun deprecating the use of the word flexibility. In my world, the words are interchangeable, no need to create any tautological confusion: most of the people who prefer the word mobility over flexibility just can't do the full splits, and they're jealous, so they get snobby. But, putting all the pop physical cultural baggage aside, the takeaway here is this: moving into and out of stretched positions is more important than holding stretched positions, although holding stretched positions still has its place and value! So do both, and do both with full control, never forcing yourself while relaxed. Instead, work with yourself as you explore and settle into new ranges of motion.

RULE 3. PRIORITIZE FLEXIBILITY EXERCISES THAT INVOLVE MOVEMENT AND TENSION.

Let's clarify this rule first: just because a flexibility exercise has movement and tension doesn't mean it has motion, it might mean you're moving against something immovable, like resisting a stretch, or pulling or pushing yourself into a stretch while remaining motionless. The chair splits are a perfect example, because they take a tremendous amount of control to maintain them, and that means strength to maintain tension.

Sure, I may be cooking eggs here in the chair splits, but I am contracting (moving) my legs against the chairs in order to maintain this position. It's basically an isometric strength exercise in the full range of motion. You won't get this kind of "flexibility" by exclusively working on lazy groin stretches like this one.

Moreover, that lazy groin stretch does not resemble the side split position all that much. Lazy groin stretches like these do not develop the control needed to do useful things like cooking eggs while suspended in a chair split. You will need more than this stretch alone to cook those eggs in the side splits, like a good skillet and spatula!

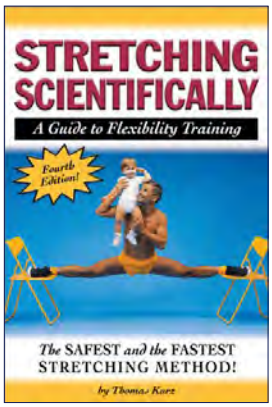
Another example is an advancement of the warrior lunge stretch.

To get deeper and better at the stretch, we "flex" the glute of the rear leg to push our hips further forward and, thus, increase the range of motion. We also stay upright and reach over the front leg to get an upper body stretch.

We prioritize flexibility exercises with the elements of movement and tension because flexibility isn't just about "elasticity" of your tissue… it's not just about chilling at the end-range of a movement. Flexibility is also about control (Rule #2), ideally at your peak ranges of motion, and control means strength and coordination. Without control you get hurt. Control is what is lacking in most people close to the full splits. Control is developed by selecting exercises that involve more movement and tension.

The weighted front split is a good example. Here I am doing it while holding a friend with one hand:

Great splits are strong splits. Why would you ever want to be able to enter an end range of motion without also being strong at that end range? Unless you're a contortionist, that would be asking for trouble and floppy woppy. You're not going to develop strength in the splits unless you train them in a way that not only taxes your range of motion, but taxes your strength. The most common way people have done this in the past is isometric contractions (basically flex their muscles) in the splits. It is also called PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation) flexibility training. Entire books have been written on this. The best book on the science of this subject is Thomas Kurz's *Stretching Scientifically*. It's a classic.



The entire message of his book can basically be summed up in this: "flex your muscles" when you're fully stretched in a static position, as hard as you can for a moment, release, then increase the stretch a little. Rest and repeat. What this "flexing" does is lower the volume of the "stretch reflex" signal your brain sends your muscles. (The stretch reflex tells your muscles not to go further into the stretch, so your body can enter greater ranges of motion if you diminish it.) Flexing while stretching works, and it's very safe and has stood the test of time, but isometric flexibility training like this is soooooooo 2002. Now, it still works, sure, but it's time to enter the new age of strong stretching. There is a better way to diminish the stretch reflex for an increased range of motion than just flexing in a stretch.

Here's how: ADD WEIGHT! It doesn't have to be much. It doesn't have to be a human like in the previous picture, just hold something. So here I'm holding a chair overhead in the front splits.

If you're having to support the weight from something in a stretched position, you won't have to fake tension with ludicrous, self made isometric contractions. You won't have to "fake flex" anything, you'll be forced to flex your muscles so you don't get crushed or collapse! Isometric flexibility exercises are like trying to imagine weight on the barbell while you do back squats. Ummm… guys... why not just actually add weight to the bar so you don't have to fake the tension? Why not just actually add weight to stretches so you don't have to fake tension?

So if you have been training the full splits for awhile and you're close but can't quite go all the way down: stop supporting yourself with your hands, stay upright. There is more than enough isometric force generated for flexibility development just from trying to maintain this position without the use of your hands!

"Look Mom! No hands!!!"

Soon after you get used to this (a week or two later), grab something: a kettlebell(s), dumbbell(s), weight plate(s), gallon jug(s), etc. Even 10 lbs (about 5 kgs) would be a great start. Once you start, you'll probably find the 15-45 lb (7-20 kg) weight range works itself out to be the best for training flexibility this way. Hold these things over head, out, and close to you. Change it up.

I just told you what nobody has been saying: ADD WEIGHT TO YOUR FLEXIBILITY TRAINING. And this leads us to the final rule...

RULE 4. PRIORITIZE FLEXIBILITY EXERCISES THAT INVOLVE STRUCTURE OR MAKE USE OF EQUIPMENT.

Structure and equipment are your ultimate means to increasing tension and difficulty in a stretch and facilitating the greatest ranges of motion. Generally, the greatest levels of flexibility are obtained by entering positions that the human body alone cannot enter. To attain these positions, you need help from stuff.

For example, below I'm stretching my right glute on a large block.

Using this block positions my body in space so that my left leg does not get jammed against the floor, which would limit the range of motion I could achieve in my right glute. The use of this structure increases the maximum range of motion possible for my glute, which is my target.

The truth is that there are an extremely limited number of flexibility exercises that cannot be improved without making use of an external element. In fact, the only exercise I can really think of that is best done without an external element is a front lift kick.

It's also true in strength training that there are an extremely limited number of strength exercises that cannot be improved without making use of external elements. How about bodyweight strength training? Bodyweight strength training has a minimalist appeal, but the reality is that bodyweight strength training would still be dwarfed without the help of pull up bars, dip bars, or even just concrete ledges, slants, or hangs. If bodyweight strength training took the minimalist approach to its logical end, all you would have would be an empty floor. You'd be stuck with planches, handstand stuff, and pistol squats. Maybe a few other things, but not much! You can get a lot of worth out of those exercises, but ask yourself, "Why?". Why oh why in the world would you limit yourself artificially to such an austere minimalist approach when it would take no effort at all to find something or someone to increase the variety and difficulty of your exercises? The latter would inevitably build a superior level of fitness and make the training itself 1000x more enjoyable and interesting?! Jeez, how about just a tree or something to balance, hang, or push on? Look, the greatest athletes in the world all use stuff to train better. So why would you do this to yourself when it comes to flexibility training by seeking out big empty spaces?

Even yoga enthusiasts use mats, yoga blocks, wedges, towels, and other junk. Don't train flexibility empty handed. Find complex environments and equipment to use to your advantage. The best flexibility training environments look like jungles, not fields.

And the best warriors in jungles or fields enter equipped! Now, let's start with an exercise example: the overhead squat equipped with a barbell.

Have you ever tried bodyweight overhead squats? It's almost impossible to set the bar all the way back behind you without the barbell and weight to counterbalance you into this awesome position. So if you just add a bit of weight, 40-90 lbs (18-41 kgs) to accomplish this, it actually becomes easier! And your technique improves!

Let's return to the weighted splits for a moment: did you know holding a light barbell in the front splits for me is easier than doing it without holding it? It's true. If not a barbell, a light girl.

With the added weight overhead in this example, my rear leg is smooshed into the floor. This increases my support because more of my leg is in contact with the ground, and so there is more surface area to increase my balance. But you wouldn't know this unless I told you. Now I have. Now you know: weighted front splits are not hard at all. Up to a certain amount of weight, they're easier and better for flexibility development than normal front splits! So again, if you've been training for the full front splits and you're still a little ways off, you need to immediately begin adding weight. Grab a 10-45 lb (5-20 kg) object and hold it somehow, probably overhead, while you train your split. Or, if it's too exhausting to hold objects, wear a weighted vest.

EXAMPLES OF ALL 4 RULES IN ACTION

So with these rules guiding us, let's explore a few examples. First, we must start with our goal movement. That's rule #1. You wouldn't just decide you need more chest flexibility for the hell of it, would you? Don't waste your time. Develop chest flexibility only if you need it for something. Like pressing. Right? Perhaps the dumbbell chest press? Feeling tight?

So here we go, all 4 rules in action: the movement itself (dumbbell chest pressing) is our flexibility target, control maintained (otherwise the weight would crush you), tension (the weight crushing you), and making use of an outside object to force you into greater ranges of motion (the dumbbell crushing you and stretching you as it crushes you). It's pretty much a perfect chest stretch, and so why would you ever do anything else to develop more range of motion in your pressing. You can just hang out at the bottom of a few reps sometime during your training session. You can also move the weight around to broaden the stretch's effect: 3 dimensional stretching!

Here's another example: chest fly machine. Set the machine arms on a chest fly machine so they are all the way back and stretch you every rep.

Stretching at the top of lat pulldown reps. See the stretching pain face?

Yes that's Rich Piana, and he's a super nice guy. I like him a lot. So, how about stretching at the bottom of tricep overhead extension reps? Here's a unilateral cable variation:

Use exercises with a stretch component and just resist or "hang out" at the start or bottom between reps or at the end of the set. It will increase flexibility in the movements better than anything else. And if you buy into the theory of "fascial sheath" stretching, then doing these at the end of a high volume set that gets the muscle pumped up will stretch the "fascial sheath" and give the surrounding muscles more space for muscle growth. Bigger muscles! If it's not the fascia being stretched, then whatever the biological mechanism, it's still hard to find examples of bodybuilders who haven't seen great growth with "heavy stretching." Just ask some of them...

This is why you see a lot of bodybuilders emphasize the "stretch" component of their exercises. I believe they do this because it works, and I have to agree. When I started training my chest with huge stretches, I began getting stretch marks on my chest, and my chest grew inches in only a couple months… This was something ring flyes and bench pressing never did. I had to get on a chest fly machine at the gym and have that sucker wing my arms back to the point of wackiness… Then my chest started growing like crazy. I kept my diet, supplements, and training split patterns exactly the same. The only thing I changed at all was how I trained my chest, I trained it with super stretching like those bodybuilders I observed. And boy, is my chest really flexible now too!!! So now ask yourself this: what sense does it make to do separate stretches, like these pictured below, to increase the range of motion in these resistance exercises?

Sure, supplementing with separate stretches can add valuable variety, but I think any value from variety should be first obtained through variations of the weighted resistance exercises taken to their maximum range of motion, with a focus on something like the aforementioned 3 dimensional stretching in the dumbbell chest press example.

How about the power lifts? Do you need more range of motion in your deadlift? Maybe your hamstrings are tight. Try narrowing your stance in a stiff leg deadlift.

You can also do stiff leg deadlifts with this narrow stance on a platform for an even greater stretch response. Just kick a flat plate under the bar and give it a go. You can elevate yourself right until the top of your foot is in near contact with the bar.

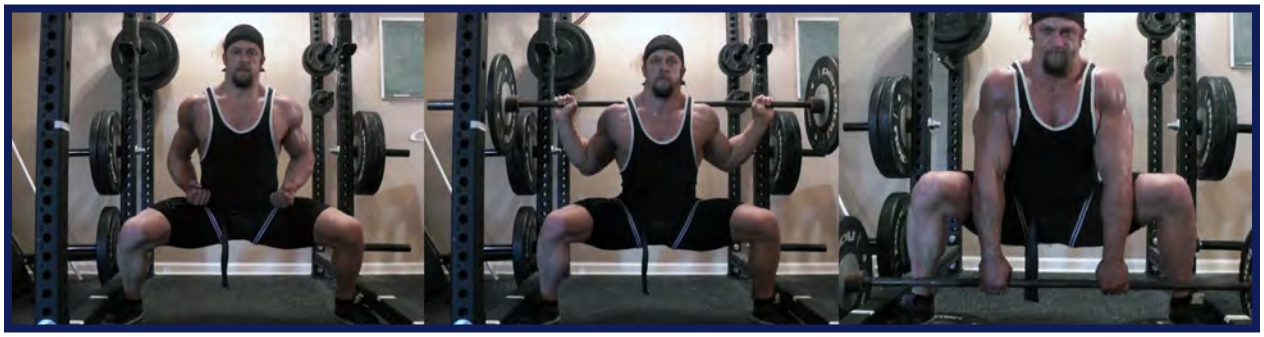
Does this not remind you of a familiar and popular stretching exercise?

The above classic stretch is fine and all, sure, but it isn't following our 4 rules. There is no movement, no tension, and no use of outside equipment. It's better than nothing, but if you have something, you might as well use that something to help you, right? If you need more flexibility in your hammies, then stick to deadlifting in those stiff leg variations. Keep the weight lower and focus on the range of motion, not on hauling tons of weight. Pause at the bottom to get a good end stretch and do some reps. Remember, flexibility is often best developed through movement and tension. But there is another benefit here: weighted powerlifts like these have ridiculously good carryover to split variations and other feats of strength and acrobatics. I can attest, being a powerlifter myself and training through the fullest ranges of motion on the exercises have been a key advantage I've had in crossing over into other training disciplines.

How about sumo deadlifts? The traditional (non-stiff leg) sumo deadlift demands a lot of groin and hip flexibility. In itself, it is a great flexibility exercise for carryover to other things too, like the side splits. If you want more flexibility in the sumo deadlift itself, or want to really turn things up a notch to get some great carryover to the side splits, we can elevate it. See how I'm standing on plates now:

Use the barbell to pull yourself deeper into the sitting stance. Push your knees out with your elbows for a greater groin stretch. Keep your back upright!

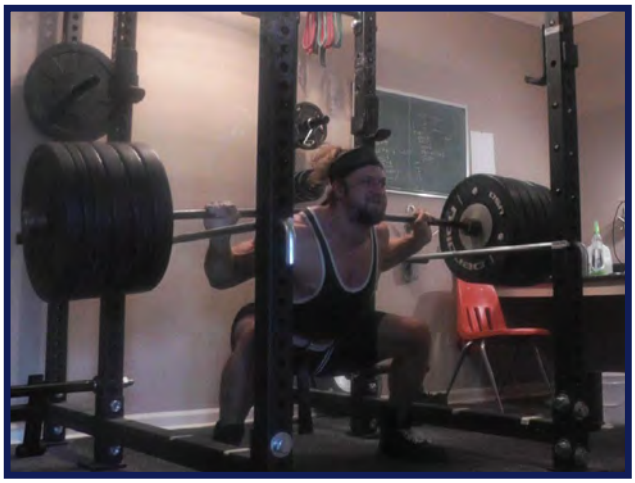
Doesn't all of this resemble the martial arts sitting stance? It looks a bit like the positioning of a back squat too.



The sitting stance is a fantastic stance to hold for developing your side split. It's part of a popular progression! Not only because it stretches you, but because it requires you to maintain control, which improves your strength while your groin is being stretched out.

Well, same thing with wide back squats and wide sumo deadlifts, only you have weight on your back or in your hands which improves strength even more! That makes both the weighted barbell back squat and weighted barbell sumo deadlift SUPERIOR to the sitting stance for side split carryover! The external element pushes your hips further back into a seated position (an increased range of motion). It also stretches your upper back as you fight to stay upright, which the sitting stance doesn't do.

The sky's the limit with resistance here: I could do sets of pause squats with tons of weight, focusing on sitting deep, and I get a strengthening response along with improved flexibility. Don't forget to max out! And hey, try maxing out deep!



Also, don't forget to be a bit creative: stiff leg elevated sumo deadlifts. Just keep the bar as close to your body as possible, keep your back flat, and use the right amount of weight (not too much, not too little) so you don't screw up your spine.

So if powerlifters are so strong on all these movements, why can't all strong powerlifters do the splits and stuff? Because they don't practice the splits, duh. They don't care. They squat for strength, not for flexibility. They're concerned with getting "out of the hole" immediately at the legal depth, not going deeper than they need to or staying at the bottom position to stretch. Different goals.

But if you're interested in flexibility for these lifts, and using these lifts to carryover into other feats of strength and flexibility, then do this: practice them for flexibility, use light-moderate weight, and pause at bottom and top. Focus on increasing range of motion first and foremost and then weight second. We've just repurposed the power lifts for flexibility development, perhaps we can lovingly call them flexibility lifts now? Or stretch lifts? Or lift stretches?!

And as a side note, if you're interested in the side splits (and weighted chair splits), now you know what supplementary exercises you should be doing with your chair side split practice: deep ass pause squats with a moderate amount of weight. That's black belt flexibility training! Grow out of the white belt sitting stances if you've been using them, you gotta add weight!

ening our needed movement patterns by practicing exercises to warm ourselves up to peak performance. If our static stretches aren't of the extended, relaxed, yoga type and duration. Rather, if they're ones that follow my rules in Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises, and are paired with things like kicks, swings, jumps, and other relevant movements that relate to our activity, then they will benefit your training. Even if you just do lazy, relaxed stretches, they will still help you if you follow those up with enough time for dynamic movements and key warm up exercises to prepare for any sort of exercise. Static stretches before training are not the boogeyman that exercise hobbyists have made them out to be, all a bunch of amateurs… And people still ask me how to get flexible!!! Well, setting up rules for when you can and cannot stretch is not helping people get flexible. Sure there are best times, but if it's not the best time, it doesn't mean it's necessarily a bad time or a waste of time. Yes, I did make the opinion that morning stretching is probably a waste of time in Train flexibility when you train other things in Part II, Collection 1: Circumstances, but really it's going to help you if it's all you do otherwise. It's just not the best circumstance for achieving some high end flexibility goal (like the full splits or high kicks).

Second, a blanket statement like "static stretching before training is bad" makes the assumption that when you do static stretching, every muscle group in your body is being stretched. It also makes the assumption that when you train, every muscle group in your body is being stressed. I mean, just look at this 135 lb (61 kg) pistol squat:

To warm up to max out on this pistol squat, I spent the first 30 minutes doing nothing but a gauntlet of thoracic extension stretches on a PVC pipe, relaxed abs stretches, relaxed wrist stretches, and relaxed ankle stretches. I also do a relaxed static stretch just with that one hamstring (the left one in the picture above) before the set. Why? I need to clear the ground with that leg. If I can't stretch that leg enough in front of me, then that heel will touch the ground, so the hamstring has to be loose enough to stretch out of the way. So after all that, I did some bodyweight pistol squats to get the pattern firing. Then I grabbed the barbell for the first time and I started working my way up in weight for 15 minutes until I was doing it with 135 lbs (61 kgs), all the while supplementing with more of those relaxed stretches as needed. If something felt "tight" in an area that needed to relax… I used my build up sets of the actual exercise itself, the pistol squat, as feedback for what needed stretched more. In my own case, my wrists suck, so I kept having to add more wrist stretches between sets. Deep and relaxed static wrist stretches to be precise. And then marvel of marvel, I accomplished this stupid feat of strength… with the help of tactical relaxed static stretches during the warm up!

So not every muscle in the body is in an active role during every movement, sometimes they are in a passive supporting role. That means the muscle needs to be "okay" with just sitting at an end range of motion, or it needs to get the hell out of the way so the movement can execute! Relaxed static stretches can help with these needs.

Third, the muscle group, the position, the volume, and the degree to which the stretch is taken to its maximum conclusion can all result in totally different consequences! If your hamstrings are so tight when you are well rested that you can't even pick up a bar to deadlift without feeling them whine, then using a couple sets of static style stretches that follow my 4 rules will be of tremendous value to you before you work up in weight. (See this page for an exercise recommendation: do a couple sets of elevated, stiff leg deadlifts with 20% of your max for 6 reps with a 2-3 second pause at the bottom.) That will help!

An opposing example would be practicing extreme back bridges for 30-60 minutes before heavy deadlifting. Not only is that range of motion not helpful for preparing you to deadlift, but it's also a different position: perhaps the lumbar spine responds differently to this degree and position than another more mild, terminal, and specific back stretch? Not all positions and movements are equal. A static hamstring stretch before kicking IS NOT THE

SAME AS a static bridge stretch before deadlifting. Muscle groups, positions and movements, how those positions and movements are executed, number of reps, and the degree to which a stretch is taken or paired can create completely different scenarios. So following up extreme back bridge work with extreme deadlifting? Doesn't seem like a good idea to me. Does that mean *all* static stretches before training are bad then? IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE!!!

How do we know whether or not a *specific* static stretch is indeed helpful or harmful preceding training? Simple: it follows the very 1st rule of my 4 rules! Select exercises that resemble your goal's position or movement. How does a back bridge resemble a deadlift? You will never be in that position when you deadlift! Stick to the 4 rules! They are all you need. There is safety in them as well as the promise of maximum results.

This whole superstition that "static stretches before training is bad" needs to die. It's a terribly sloppy assertion! So here are your takeaway points:

1. Allowing the body to cool down will hinder maximum effort. It doesn't matter whether it's relaxing in a stretch or in a recliner!

2. Performance is a specific thing. For increased performance, you need to stretch specifically! That means timing it correctly within a workout. If you're trying to squat deeper, why would you do accessory flexibility exercises at the end of your squat session? Shouldn't you do it before and in between sets?

3. When determining whether or not a "static stretch" before training is helpful or harmful, consider the following: muscle groups, positions and movements, how those positions and movements are executed, number of reps, and the degree to which a stretch is taken. And what kind of training are you doing anyway? Read my 4 rules!

4. A little bit more about that barbell pistol squat I mentioned previously: I didn't do any glute stretches before the pistol squatting. Why? Because my glutes don't need stretched for this, they need to contract to get me up out of the hole! I stretched the antagonists, not the agonists. If you believe in stretching after an effort to restore length to shortened muscle groups, then throw some stretches at the end of your workout for them. I'd rather cook food, do laundry, or clean house after a workout while I have a bit of post-workout productivity energy rather than stretch myself into a nap.

But stretching the glutes before this meathook might matter, the left glute specifically, because all its doing here, is stretching! It needs to relax out of the way!

This same specificity MUST go into your splits training if that is your goal. I do bird dog exercises and some sumo deadlifts before I do side split stunts to activate my glutes and get them firing.

With the sumo deadlift, the use of the glutes to achieve the end position feels exactly like what it feels like when sliding into the side splits. Push those hips forward!

So I don't stretch the glutes for the side splits because they need to WORK, they need to FLEX to push my hips forward so I can achieve the correct alignment for this position. Behold, the starting position for the sidesplits:

My hip muscles, on the other hand, need to simply be "okay" with just sitting at the end range of motion, so I'll do warrior lunge stretches to "calm" them down. It's a combination of contract and relax, calm and hype, go and let go. It's control: the strength to push with one group and the coordination to relax another group at that same time. Certain groups work and others get out of the way. It's a skill that needs to be practiced with an intention for doing it better every time!

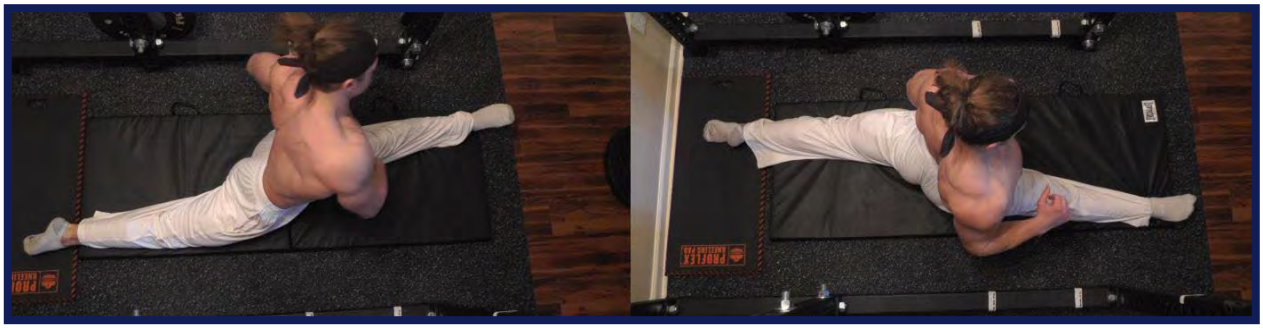
So the movement you are doing determines which flexibility exercise you supplement with and when to sequence it during a workout. That movement very well indeed may require some relaxed static stretches. Just be mindful about the specificity of your stretch selection!

Now that we've talked about sequencing stretching within a workout, let's talk about sequencing it within a week or month, and how to balance it with everything else we train by using periodization.

PERIODIZE YOUR FLEXIBILITY TRAINING BY PRIORITIZING IT

If you're maxing your resources on training your skills, strength, or whatever, you should be also maxing your range of motion on those movements. Squatting heavy? Should be squatting ass to grass. Jump kicking? Should be kicking as high as you can. You should be integrating dedicated flexibility movements that you've chosen or created based upon the 4 rules outlined in Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises during all your workouts too. Read the previous section Correctly sequence your flexibility work within a workout and week in Part II, Collection 4: Programming for sequencing advice within a workout for those exercises.

But then we have the common example of someone wanting to do the full splits. Think of them like, say, flares. I've gotten good advice for this move from someone extremely good at them (though I can't do flares myself) that you need to prioritize it by devoting an hour when you are fresh to work on it 3 days per week, every week, until you learn it. Simple advice. Now if carryover was enough, then I should be able to do flares because I'm super strong, flexible, and generally coordinated. However, I can't do flares because I've never devoted this time to it, nor for any uninterrupted training phase. It's one of those things that you need to attack directly. But it's also one of those things you need to work on consistently until you get them. It's learned best with a phase based learning process. The splits are exactly the same way. Infinite carryover is not enough to have the splits: you need to approach them like a skill with time dedicated to them exclusively for practice. You need to enter a "splits training phase" if you want them. A "splits training phase" means prioritizing them.



A phase model isn't fancy, but it's part of our everyday reality. Think of sleep. If you get interrupted after 5 minutes every time you fall asleep during the night, you'll feel terrible. Sleep is a phase based process. Similarly, if you're trying to concentrate on a very complicated problem, and your phone keeps buzzing or dinging, then you'll have a helluva time getting "into the zone" to make meaningful improvement. Actually, the reality is this: everything we do is a phase based process on some scale, tiny or humongous.

And meaningful improvement in flexibility, especially in complex skills like the splits or a bridge, is best accomplished through a phase based learning process. Here's how to do it: make them a priority for 3 months straight, or 12 weeks. Don't just try them half-heartedly with your scraps of energy. You've got to cut things out and you've got to plan to allocate your energy and work on them when you feel good. You feel best before the end of a hard strength training or tricking session. Before you go all out, cut out a few sets or exercises, and channel your heightened physical state into splits practice. Otherwise, reserve some days you feel very fresh for practice dedicated exclusively to them. That's the fast track for full splits, and I cover these types of exclusive splits workouts in The splits routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs. You have to prioritize them to get them...

These days I do indeed rely on carryover to maintain my splits from other things because the splits aren't just a physical attribute (see Attain permanent flexibility in Part II, Collection 5: Psychology to read how confidence plays a role in high levels of flexibility). But when I got the splits, I had to invest some startup time, I had to go through my own full splits training phase process. This meant daily training for the splits for an entire summer. Almost any high level feat of flexibility or skill you can think of must be achieved by prioritizing it for a period of time (periodization). Then once you get your skill(s) (in this case the full splits), they'll stick around with just enough maintenance training, direct or indirect. They have for me for almost 15 years now, but to get there initially it was prioritized and brute forced.

You can invent any fancy periodization model you feel comfortable with to achieve this, but simplicity works best: prioritize your flexibility by working it everyday, and take a back off week every 3-5 weeks. Continue until you reach your goal. Shouldn't take more than a few months from scratch if you're young and already into fitness, maybe more if you're older and/or untrained.

Let's talk more about that back off week thing.

SCHEDULE WHEN YOUR BODY ADAPTS TO YOUR FLEXIBILITY TRAINING

Flexibility improvement is not linear. Eventually you will need to step it up, or back the hell off to make new improvements. Stepping it up is intuitive, you just do more, do it better, and do it harder. Or you keep doing what you're doing even when you don't feel like it. Everyone tries this when they first get stuck without further progress. They get frustrated so they spin their wheels some more. This works, but only if you follow this additional "wheel spinning" by backing off with a block of uninterrupted rest.

Backing off is not only hard to do, it's completely counter-intuitive for flexibility training. Yet it is the best advice I can give people who are doing everything right already with any intensive flexibility training. Here is the unabashed, #realtalk type advice I like to give for people stuck in their flexibility training, especially for full splits:

"Been training for months and not getting anywhere? Stop training for 7-10 days. Don't do ANYTHING during that time. No squats. No blood flow movement. No cardio or jogging. No jumping. No nothin' !!! Sit on your ass, eat mac and cheese, drink Gatorade and watch Netflix dramas. If you're a guy, sit when you pee. Start to feel depressed from lack of activity and movement. Then after 7-10 days of this, start training again just like you were, everyday after those 7-10 days. The first few days back, you will hate my guts because you will feel like garbage and it'll seem like you took two steps backward. But then after those first few days back, by the end of that first week back to training, something extraordinary will happen. When it happens, come back and report how I am this world's gift for flexibility enlightenment. Send me nice office supplies. I like colored Sharpie markers of various sizes."

It's called a back off week. It works. Oh my, oh my, does it ever work! The problem is that people don't realize they need to do this for flexibility training. More importantly, they don't do it right. They need to stop everything. No strength training, no tricking, no nothin'… Remember, flexibility is complex. It's not just "stretchiness", it's also strength and coordination. It's even emotional. And it correlates directly with athletic performance. You won't recover if you're still hammering in the strength and speed work, or trying to flip and do hard workout stuff. You have got to stop EVERYTHING. Yes you will freakin' hate this.

Yes you will feel anxious, lazy, depressed, fat, soft, stiff, and everything else imaginable that sucks. You will start breathing heavy and your blood work will worsen. You will feel absolutely miserable not training for this week. You may experience a breakup because of your mood swings. You may need to go on depression medicine. But whatever you do, do not sneak in any work. It's a psychological battle, but you have to do it. Flexibility dominant training is just as much of a psychological battle as strength dominant training or any other skill practice. Furthermore, part of that battle is fought as time off from flexibility training itself, and all other training as well.

COLLECTION 5: Psychology

GET RID OF HARMFUL FLEXIBILITY EXPECTATIONS

Peak performance is rare for anything in life, because peak performance is a fatigable phenomenon. This means peak performance flexibility is also fatigable. So if you hit the chair splits today for the first time ever, you might be so sore and fatigued from the effort that you won't be able to do them again for over a week.

Flexibility is also influenced by everything else that fatigues you. For example, if you stood up all day to restock produce at your job at the grocery store, your feet and back could be sore from the physical labor. In which case, your flexibility could suffer among other biomotor characteristics (like strength and speed).

So expect flexibility to be subjected to the same laws as all other feats of physical fitness. Everything you do and have done and will do, will influence your fitness, and thus, your flexibility. So eat right, sleep right, move right, and rest right.

But once you've rested, recovered, and reconsidered your flexibility destiny, you're still going to need plenty of uninterrupted time to get ready to display your greatest feats of flexibility! Do not expect flexibility to be on instant demand. It takes me almost an entire hour to warm up for weighted chair splits, and that's when I'm rested and ready! It's no joke, that feat takes me longer to warm up for than any other physical feat I can do. If it were easy, everyone would be doing it...

So remember, flexibility fluctuates, it is not consistent day to day or week to week. In fact, when you start training flexibility seriously for the first time ever, you will probably feel like you are making it worse! Why? Fatigue! Your body gets exhausted and must adapt. During that process, you will likely experience a worsening of your ranges of motion. Don't let it mess with your head, keep at it. And yes, stretch through soreness (see Stretching when sore in Appendix I: Flexibility Q&A).

BUILD YOUR FLEXIBILITY CONFIDENCE

Did you know that very deep ranges of motion, like full splits, have something in common with fear based skills like backflips, fulltwists, and other things that require confidence? If you don't commit to these flips, then you will crash and cause more damage to yourself than if you just committed to these skills and landed them. The same is true for the splits: if you just commit to go past certain ranges of motion, then it will be less painful.

When I share with people the fact that partial splits, for me, are more painful than full splits (especially weighted splits), they look confused. The mechanics of this is simple: when you're all the way down, you have added support from the additional contact your lower body makes with the ground, which relieves tension. The same is even more true for the chair splits.

The most painful part of the chair splits is actually here. It absolutely sucks:

Once you go past that point, by committing to going deeper, you enter the full position with more support here.

The very bottom still hurts but not nearly as much as the position immediately preceding it.

How does the very bottom have more support? For the same reason it's easier to pause a squat ass to grass than halfway down. At the very bottom, there is nowhere else to go. In which case, your musculature and bone structures bunch all upon themselves, providing support you don't have when you're only *almost* there.

For many people, the "mobility problem" they experience with some movements and skills aren't caused from lack of flexibility, sometimes it is caused from not committing to the full range of motion. Not committing is a confidence issue. Commitment is scary! You're afraid you're going to pull a groin, a hamstring, or something else if you go all the way. I've seen many people with back squatting issues having confidence issues, they're afraid they're going to fall backward. It is actually a very common problem. Tons of people who can't squat ass to grass are just afraid of falling backward!

Now note, there is a difference between allowing yourself to go all the way and forcing yourself to go all the way. Don't force it, remember Rule 2 in Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises, Alway maintain full control in your flexibility exercises.

How do you build your flexibility confidence then? Visualization? Sure you could do that, but here's what I suggest instead: stretch in front of people. You need to put yourself out there. Want the splits? Visualize yourself practicing in front of others, then do it! When you

train, you should train for that type of moment. Or just perform flexibility in a routine if you compete in some form of movement art like I did when I was a kid.

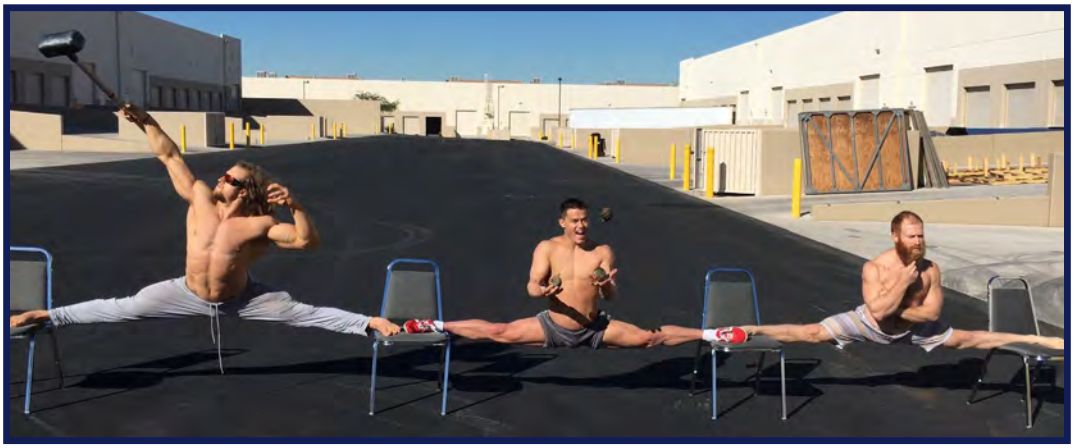
Schedule and prepare for your moments of pressure. Remember, we talked about your moment, or rather, your story in Part I, Step 2: Create your flexibility story. When you are scheduled for a situation of pressure, you will begin visualizing out of worry.

When I have to perform my feats of strength and flexibility at expos, I worry about it for days ahead of time, weeks if I'm working with an injury. That worry encourages me to recover my best for it, prepare mentally, and practice. Otherwise, I'd get hurt and humiliated, while disappointing my fans. My worry results in visualizing things that scare me into doing things to prepare physically. This is the way visualization was meant to be done: by following through with actual action! Here I am at an expo holding the 115 lb (52 kg) Jolene Tran for a weighted chair split stunt.

So now, here's a secret about sport confidence: it's best developed by physical preparation and difficult performance. So the best way to push yourself past your physical limits is to prepare for, and perform in, high pressure situations. Schedule one, prepare for it, and do it. Even if you just plan to train your splits, kicks, or squats in front of people at your gym, commit to that at least!

Now, I've been through periods of not doing any splits for years, yet I could still do them. This is partly due to the flexibility confidence I built from performing in front of others years prior. I've noticed some of my peers who had unlocked the splits had similar experiences. A few months ago, I asked one of these fellows, Yuri Marmerstein (@yuri_marmerstein), this question:

"Could you tell me why you think you could still chair split having not done them in such a long time (years)?"



Yuri, the bearded fellow on the far right of this picture, had not done chair splits in years before we took this picture! He answered:

> *"I have not tried chair split in a few years, but I still do train splits in general (though not as much as I should). Side splits especially was one that I was able to keep once I had "unlocked" the skill.*
>
> *Even the last time I tried the chair split, it was just playing around with it and not actually training it. I did it to see that I could. I still regularly train legs, though not always with weights, and I do stretch a good amount.*

A big part of flexibility (and life in general) as I see it is to break through the psychological limitations which hinder the body from going to full capacity. I didn't know if my hips/knees would be strong enough to hold a chair split, but I was confident and once I tested it out I knew my body would hold up for at least a few repetitions.

It's definitely about confidence. This weekend I performed at an event and I found I was able to hit the same chair split completely cold. Of course there is an overlap between confidence and physical preparation. In the past I have subluxed my hip several times (and took a few days to pop it back in) from stretching too aggressively.

Short answer is I know that I've done it before, so I should be able to replicate the movement, especially when the pressure is on."

Higher ranges of flexibility, like full splits, do share quite a lot in common with acrobatic stunts mostly governed by fear. The backflip is a great example. It's not at all physically extreme: if you can jump up at a moderate height, you can backflip. It's just a jump where you ball your legs up and roll over at the top. It's an amazingly efficient movement. It requires average physical capability, but a certain level of technical awareness and familiarity. You build the technical awareness by studying the movement and visualizing yourself doing it. When you familiarize yourself to it this way, it becomes less scary and you become more confident. To further nurture that confidence, you approach it intelligently step by step. Instead of trying it alone, with mattresses, platforms, and pits, you get someone to spot you in order to protect you while trying it. After you prove to yourself you can attempt it without landing on your head with the help of your spotter protecting you, your confidence surges, the spotter steps back, and you land your very own backflip. Then you keep doing it to increase familiarity and reduce fear further, and it becomes something permanent if done a certain # of reps over a certain span of time.

So let's talk about how we can build flexibility confidence through the same process. In Part I, Step 3: Brute Force 1000 reps we covered the sidesplit test. If you can do this for each leg, one leg at a time, then there is nothing stopping you from achieving the sidesplit.

The thing stopping you is your nervous system and fear. To condition your nervous system to accept that holding both legs at the same time in this position is acceptable, you strengthen the muscles through a full range of motion to better control your stretch reflex.

You also execute the movement correctly. (See the splits routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs for correct execution of the skill.) Once you begin doing this, and the results begin showing up, your confidence surges. You'll have the confidence of Thor going into battle!

Aside from confidence, long-term physiological adaptations to flexibility training last longer than strength gains. They stick around a long time! There is some evidence of this in former gymnasts and dancers who progress into older ages: they're more likely than non-athletes to get sprains & strains in old age precisely because their body retains their high range of motion increases, but not their strength in those ranges of motion (for those that stopped training), so they'll slip into high stretched positions, instinctively try to save themselves, but lack the strength to avoid damage.

So this should be motivation for you: flexibility gains last a very long time. With a proper flexibility training cycle to build it up initially, then general maintenance after that, and retention of confidence throughout your training lifetime, you can achieve something seemingly akin to permanently increased levels of flexibility, even high levels of flexibility can become seemingly permanent.

ATTAIN PERMANENT FLEXIBILITY

Here's a picture of me doing the splits July 24th 2008. This picture is special because the last time I did the splits before this was around June 2005. 3+ years had passed!!! How did I still have the splits?!

3 years of not training the splits and I still had all of them! No problem. How? Flexibility isn't just about elasticity of the tissue, it's about strength and coordination: control. Coordination is governed by the technicalities of the skill, thus, flexibility for the splits is also about technique! Control is something I regularly worked through my squatting workouts, and through my practice of acrobatic tricking. I had "unlocked" the splits in my youth within a 3 month maniac training period. That developed the technical awareness, coordination, and confidence for it. I experienced that as a permanent change. Like riding a bike, I never forgot "how" to do the splits when they finally clicked for me. I've never forgotten and never will. And doing it so many times in my past had developed a confidence that I could do it, because I did, so many times!

So since then, I have relied very heavily on carryover from my other training to support the ability to do the splits. My deep squats and high flexibility tricks maintain the strength, control, and coordination necessary to use the split technique. Since I do these squats and tricks through a full range of motion, the tissues are getting the stretch carryover for the splits. It's beautiful really. To maintain my splits, I barely ever have to train them. This saves a lot of time too. So like my friend Yuri Marmerstein, at times, I doubt and fear my body will be able to withstand these high ranges of motion, but I just think back to all the times I had went through long periods of not training the splits directly, and recognize whatever training I'm doing now makes a positive difference, and I always find I still have them.

[BECOME LEGENDARY CHALLENGE]

To build the confidence of the legends of flexibility you need to survive difficult battles. The legends all prepared their flexibility for fights and feats during long, uncertain days. Do you have a flexibility fight, or a flexibility feat that can break you? Create it and prepare for it. Only through real trial of circumstance will you build the confidence of legends and the legendary flexibility they acquired.

PART III
FLEXIBILITY TRAINING PROGRAMS

ROUTINE 1: The splits

Facts about the splits:

FACT #1—The full splits are a worthy goal.

Here are the reasons why:

- Full splits earn you a reputation as "a flexible person".
- Full splits impress common people as much as a back flip.
- Full splits have wonderful carryover to overall athletics.

FACT #2—Full front splits are easier than full side splits.

I would say that the full front splits are roughly 5x easier than full side splits in my experience. And in my observation, there are scores of people (both male and female) who can do full front splits but much fewer can do full side splits.

FACT #3—The full splits are not an advanced skill.

Full splits of either type are actually an intermediate skill. With proper training, you can build them within a year without flexibility training experience if you are healthy, active, and relatively young (20s or younger would see fastest results, see Am I too old to be flexible in Appendix II: Flexibility Q&A for more information on this). To contrast, to build a 2.5x-3.0x bodyweight deadlift, it would take a couple years of training the lift at least (I'm guessing). That's an advanced lift. The time to achievement comparison between this heavy of a deadlift with the full splits should give you an idea of what I mean here when I call the full splits an intermediate rather than an advanced skill.

FACT #4—Not many people have full splits because not many people train them.

The full splits are popular, no doubt, but the majority of people just don't care enough to attain them or they overestimate the difficulty of the skill and don't even begin trying it. Again, do not overestimate the difficulty of full splits.

FACT #5—The splits are a technical skill (like a flip or a lift).

You don't just do them, you practice them. Specifically, you practice doing them better by paying attention to the details: how you are entering and supporting them and how you can cope with the discomfort. Earlier in this book, we talked about setting up for the splits by getting mats and wearing clothing that slides (Part I, Step 5 Build your flexibility toolkit), and in Part II Flexibility Training Strategies we covered tons of ways to optimize your training for adaptation. These optimizations will give you the best chance of good technical development and, thus, GAINZ! But if you are still practicing the splits incorrectly, you could be greatly limiting your results.

The techniques for the splits are simple, but there are some things that can make it work better. First, you must learn to properly enter the splits. Let's just dive into an analogy: you need to have the "roundoff" trained well to tumble in gymnastics (a roundoff is usually the very first movement used to start a tumbling pass of flips).

So if your roundoff is bad, then your entire pass is bad. Similarly, if you don't enter the splits right, then you won't split right. This is highly important for the side splits, even more so for the chair splits. Watch the following videos for how to enter the side splits and front splits.

JUJIMUFU - HOW TO ENTER THE SIDE SPLITS

JUJIMUFU - FRONT SPLIT TRAINING SECRETS

ACROBOLIX SPLITS TRAINING ROUTINE 1: EXTREME RELAXED SPLITS

JUJIMUFU - EXTREME RELAXED SPLITS

Throughout this book I've preached to strengthen your splits. That's usually interpreted as shorter, more intense training sets. But, realistically, you still have to spend more and more time at the end range of motion to attain full splits, and relaxed stretching is how to do that. Relaxed split work has another key value though, it gets you comfortable "psychologically" with "splitting", because fear is a real issue with splits training. Split fear doesn't feel like outright inhibition (like, say, backflip fear would feel like), but it manifests in more of a low grade reluctance to stretch further. This type of work gets you accustomed psychologically to these larger ranges of motion by reducing that fear fueled reluctance.

This workout takes 1 hour. Train only 2 out of these 3 split positions during that hour:

- Front split with left foot in front
- Front split with right foot in front
- Side split

STEP 1: Set up your mat and get something to occupy you (book, smartphone, TV, etc.)

STEP 2: Get a timer and press start.

STEP 3: Choose one split variation to start with.

STEP 4: Spend 10 minutes for a general warm up using any stretches you wish that'll prepare for just that split.

STEP 5: Enter the split according to the directions in the previous video links.

STEP 6: When you reach the uncomfortable range of motion, back off a bit and relax for 1 minute at this depth. Ultimately, it should only be "mildly" uncomfortable. MILD! You shouldn't be counting down the seconds when you can get up out of the position. You should be content to remain in the split position. In fact, just like in the previous videos, you should be able to focus on other things in the split position, such as watching TV or messing with your smart phone.

STEP 7: After your 1 minute of relaxing in your near maximum depth: get up, walk, shake, do light body weight squat motions, and move for at least 2 minutes while you rest. Use your timer to ensure that you do not start again before 2 minutes is up. You should end up repeating this cycle a few times before you reach your maximum depth for the workout. For me, it takes about 3-4 cycles.

STEP 8: When you reach your maximum depth after several cycles, spend several final minutes relaxing at this depth (more than 3 minutes). You are welcome to repeat this 3 minute plus hold up to 2 more times if you want. I'd caution against doing more than 3 sets though. Here's a review of the parameters:

- As many warm up sets of relaxed splits to get to your maximum depth.
- 3 sets of relaxed splits for any single split variation held for 3 minutes.
- Rest more than 2 minutes between sets.
- Walk around and move lightly, don't sit or stretch.

When you are done (about 30-40 minutes into your workout), go back to step 4 and start warming up for your next split variation. Remember, we are only training 2 out of 3 split variations for any one workout.

ACROBOLIX SPLITS TRAINING ROUTINE 2: WEIGHTED SPLITS

In Part I, Step 4 Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises, I laid out my 4 rules for picking good flexibility exercises. One rule is to select stretching exercises that prioritize movement and tension (even if no motion is present). Practicing your splits with elements of tension has been the royal road to full splits since people began adopting the method. But it's time to stop faking tension by "flexing" against artificial resistance, and instead create real tension with real resistance. How? Add weight. Watch this video for discussion on this topic to prepare for my weighted splits workout.

JUJIMUFU - WEIGHTED SPLITS TRAINING

Here is an additional video discussing one of my favorite supported/weighted splits training variations:

JUJIMUFU - BEST EXERCISE FOR FULL SPLITS

Like my relaxed splits workout, you will train 2 out of these 3 split positions during this workout:

- Front split with left foot in front
- Front split with right foot in front
- Side split

STEP 1: Set up your mat and/or get a chair for the side splits.

STEP 2: Get a timer and press start.

STEP 3: Choose one split variation to start with.

STEP 4: Spend 10 minutes loosening up your upper back with thoracic extension variations and other exercises that loosen up the upper back. Watch this video:

JUJIMUFU - BEST SUPPLEMENTARY STRETCH EVER

STEP 5 (optional): Since this is a "strength" based workout, you can prime your global strength activation with squats and deadlifts. For the side split, I recommend wide squats and sumo deadlifts. Keep your toes pointing straight forward to emulate the foot positioning in the splits. For the front split I recommend shoulder width squats and straight leg deadlifts. Pistol squats would also be a good choice for priming front split strength. Here is a video with discussion about repurposing powerlifts for flexibility development:

JUJIMUFU - POWERLIFTING FOR SPLITS

Pick a weight that is approximately 20%-25% of your one rep max, and do 3-5 sets of pause reps (pausing at the bottom for 2-3 seconds) for 4-6 reps. During the pauses, focus on stretching. The stretching should be what makes this somewhat uncomfortable. In between sets, do some light static stretches of your choice for fun and for encouragement. Transition from the weights and light static stretches to entering your one chosen split variation, of the 3, in the next step.

STEP 6: Enter your split. Go down almost as far as you can go, but do not go to your current maximum depth. Stay back a bit. Focus on your breathing to relax yourself while supporting yourself with your hands. Spend about 1 minute here chilling. You should not be getting tired. This shouldn't be uncomfortable. These are your warm up sets for the weighted splits. Rest between these sets for up to 2 minutes. Watch as your flexibility in the position magically seems to get better as you work gently to your maximum ranges of motion.

STEP 7: Do as many warm up sets as it takes to get near your peak range of motion. Afterward, start your first working set by entering your split holding a weighted implement with both hands or holding two weighted implements, one with each hand. Both hands must be used. You are welcome to hold whatever you have over your head, to your chest, out to the

side(s), etc. I recommend starting with something(s) that are a total of 12 lbs (about 5 kgs). If it doesn't feel much different than not holding anything, then increase the weight, find a different object, or switch from holding one object to two (or vice versa). Find your right balance. You could even use a weighted vest, that might be even better! I prefer bigger things myself, like a medicine ball or one large weight plate held with both hands. If I'm holding something in each hand, then I need more weight, perhaps double what I would need if it was one big object held with both hands. The reason for this difference is because if I'm holding two objects, one in each hand, I can balance easier by shifting my shoulders and arms around. If I'm holding one object with both hands, I can't balance as easily, so less weight is necessary because my body struggles more to balance and maintain the position.

STEP 8: When you are at your maximum range of motion with the weight(s) in hands, or worn on your body somehow, hold the final position for up to 10 seconds if it's a side split, or up to 20 seconds if it's a front split. If you can hold it longer than these times, you are not going deep enough or you are not using enough weight. You should be struggling to balance and there should be a lot of tension and discomfort. However, if you can't reach your maximum depth, or you can't hold it for more than 3 seconds, then it's too much weight. Think of it like sub maxing in weight lifting or throwing your top tricks in tricking. Here's a parameter review:

- As many warm up sets of relaxed splits to get to your maximum depth.
- Rest 2 minutes between your warm up sets. No more! No less!
- 3-5 sets of weighted splits for any one split variation.
- 3-10 seconds held at maximum depth for side splits.
- 6-20 seconds held at maximum depth for front splits.
- Rest 3:30-5:30 between sets. No less!
- Walk around and move lightly, don't sit down or stretch.

When you are done (about 50 minutes into your workout), go back to step 5 or 6 and start warming up for your next split variation. Remember, we are only training 2 out of 3 split variations for any one workout.

If you cannot do 3-5 sets, lower the weight. For example, when I max out my weighted chair splits for videos, I can usually only do it twice, then after that I can't do it anymore. So to get 3-5 sets in for a real training effect, I would use less weight! Remember what we covered in Choose the right intensity and volume in flexibility training in Part II, Collection 3: Parameters? There is a difference between testing flexibility and training it. Train with the right parameters.

If the weighted split workout (Workout #2) is too difficult for you, then pass on it and focus entirely on Workout 1 above. Workout 1 will familiarize you with the split positioning. You should revisit Workout 2 within one month. It's never going to be easy, so don't wait longer than 1 month. You need to start with it sooner rather than later, even if it's just a little weight.

After doing this entire workout, you will realize why we only train 2 out of 3 split variations. It's because it takes a long time and it's exhausting!!! By the time I'm done with this, I'm sitting at about 90-120 minutes. Adding another split variation would be a waste of time. The quality of my efforts would drop significantly as my emotional and physical reserves will have been depleted.

12 WEEKS SPLITS PROGRAM

Take Workout #1 and Workout #2 and layer them in a week, perhaps like this:

WEEK 1

M	Workout #1 (left front split, side split)
T	
W	Workout #1 (right front split, left front split)
H	Workout #2 (side split, right front split)
F	
S	
S	Workout #2 (left front split, right front split)

I'm not going to tell you how to arrange your 3 split variations workout to workout, week to week, for the duration of this 12 week program. Just keep it balanced over the course of the 12 weeks, or only focus on whatever is most important to you.

This is how many of each workout you need for each week:

WEEK 1	x2 workout #1 / x2 workout #2
WEEK 2	x4 workout #1 / x1 workout #2
WEEK 3	x2 workout #1 / x2 workout #2
WEEK 4	x0 workout #1 / x3 workout #2
WEEK 5	Back off week, no exercise
WEEK 6	x1 workout #1 / x1 workout #2
WEEK 7	x2 workout #2 / x2 workout #2
WEEK 8	x3 workout #1 / x1 workout #2
WEEK 9	x0 workout #1 / x3 workout #2
WEEK 10	Back off week, no exercise
WEEK 11	x2 workout #1 / x0 workout #2
WEEK 12	Test maximum splits when feeling your best.

Repeat this 12 week cycle until you have your desired result. Here is my logic for the number of workouts, week to week, during this 12 week cycle:

Week 1: Balanced start.

Week 2: Increase the volume, drop the intensity.

Week 3: Back to balanced load.

Week 4: Shock week with 3 intense weighted splits workouts.

Week 5: Do nothing, no training of any kind, let the body heal.

Week 6: Body still recuperating so start with lower overall load.

Week 7: Balancing the load again.

Week 8: Volume about the same, but drop the intensity.

Week 9: Shock week with 3 intense weighted splits workouts.

Week 10: 2 week deload starts. Week 1 of 2 = Do nothing, no training.

Week 11: 2nd week of 2 week deload. 2 easy workouts to warm up for week 12.

Week 12: Not a workout, just do what you have to do to test your maximum flexibility.

During Week 12, you will test your maximum splits. Enter it like a competition or a performance, it's a big deal. You just spent 11 weeks working on your splits and you should be able to see some really good results by Week 12. Wherever you are on Week 12 in terms of your new ranges of motion, repeat the cycle again and again and again until you have your splits.

For a younger person, under twenty years old, with no training experience, I'm guessing you could do this 2 times and have full splits (24 weeks or about half of a year). For an older person, over thirty years old, with training experience, I'd expect the same. In general, younger people with training experience will progress the fastest, and older people with little training experience will progress the slowest.

Now, the devil is indeed in the details. You can have the best program in the world, but if the details aren't dialed in, it may not work. What are the details? I laid those out in Part II Flexibility Training Strategies. If you aren't seeing the results you want, then see if any of these things are holding you back:

Most common culprits for not seeing results:

#1—You do too much physical activity around these workouts. So if you are drained from maxing out deadlifts, doing 20 rep sets of squats, or doing some variety of convoluted crossfit WODs, then of course you won't have the physical reserves to spend on productive splits training. Remember what was discussed in Periodize your flexibility training by prioritizing it in Part II, Collection 4: Programming. And don't let body part splitting fool you: an upper body workout may not make your legs sore and stuff, but your nervous system may be fatigued! If you can't sum up the will and emotional energy to do your flexibility training right and with gusto, then you first need to check if any other workouts are holding you back. You're going to need to ask yourself: how bad do you want the full splits?

#2—You are really out of shape. General physical conditioning will go a long way in preparing you for productive split training, so make that your first stop if you don't have it before working the splits. Get in "ok" shape before you expect to be able to withstand this splits program and actually get results. Why? Because flexibility isn't just some "lengthening" thing, it's also about strength, coordination, and pain tolerance. General physical conditioning carries over to success with the full splits because it develops these needed qualities. Here are some meaningful benchmarks for carryover:

1. Can you do front lifts and rear lifts through a full range of motion (over head height)? If not, see High kicks and flying tricks routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs.

2. Can you do a barbell back squat ass to grass with 1.5x your bodyweight? If you can't squat ass to grass, see Ass to grass squats routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs.

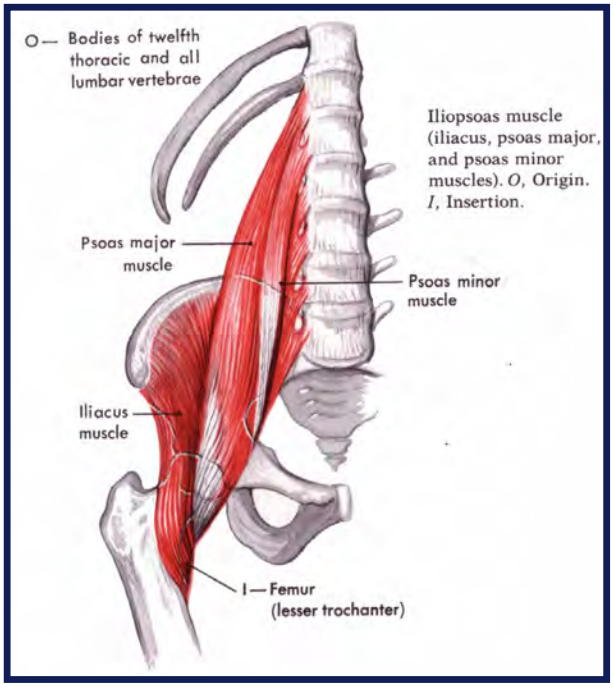
3. For the side split in particular, can you sumo deadlift 2.0x your bodyweight?

4. Can you hold a martial arts sitting stance with upper body perfectly upright, with thighs parallel to the ground, for 60 seconds?

5. Can you do 3 consecutive deep, clean, bodyweight pistol squats with a pause at the bottom (no bounce reps) and without holding onto anything for support?

The more of these you can do, the better. If you can do them all, then you'll have rapid progress with the splits. If you can't do any of them, then your progress will be slower and your risk of injury will be higher. Keep these measures of readiness in mind while you train for full splits because if things aren't looking too great, then you may want to supplement your weighted splits training with training for these benchmarks.

#3 You aren't trying hard enough or training enough. Look, the splits hurt. They only feel good if you are very experienced, you are having a great day, and you have gone through all the painful warm up sets to get to the point where they could even begin to feel good. That means the splits will never feel good until you have them mastered and have them warmed up… Until then, you have to train through discomfort that is unlike the type of discomfort you experience through traditional weight training. It often feels "wrong"… especially the insertion point of the iliacus into the leg during the side splits.



Look, I get it, these muscles hurt like crazy when you train the side splits. You're not deformed. You don't have an impingement. Your genetics don't suck (see Could my genetics be holding me back? Appendix II: Flexibility Q&A). Suck it up and deal with this pain, it gets better if you don't worry and don't rush your warm up sets. The pain never goes away completely, it always hurts, and some days it hurts way more than other days, but it will get better with work.

[BECOME LEGENDARY CHALLENGE]

Imagine if someone would pay you 100 million dollars if you got the full splits in one year. How much brain effort, how much reflection on your training for the splits, and how many things would you change in your lifestyle to accommodate for this task? How would you change your day to day life if this was really deliverable? Would a split training program like this one even matter at that point when, everyday, your life objective is "full splits"??? Wouldn't you, in some way, be training for the full splits everyday? Challenge yourself with this mental exercise.

ROUTINE 2: High kicks and flying tricks

Watch this video as a primer to this routine.

JUJIMUFU - STRETCHES FOR STARTING TRICKING

This routine is what I'd give to someone who wants to kick higher and get the flexibility they need for cool aerial tricks. It's primarily a dynamic flexibility program, which means controlled but quick swings, kicks, lifts, etc. Let me start by giving you a secret about all of the skills and variations in tricking: pretty much all the acrobatic tricks you've ever seen lead back to these basic movement types:

- Flip backwards or forwards (never at the same time).
- Jump spin left or right (never at the same time).
- Stick a leg or two out, or back, while spinning and/or flipping.
- Put your hand on the ground sometimes.

Only a few of these movements make use of greater ranges of motion:

- Bend backwards or sidewards.
- Turn left or right.
- Stick a leg out front, back, or side.
- Reach with your arm up, out, or back.

And now, here is your tricking flexibility routine to develop these movements.

OVERALL DYNAMIC STRETCHING

Do the following movements in any order and do not count the reps on these, just do them until you feel good for 10 minutes total time.

- Thoracic extensions
- Cobra stretch
- Side bends
- Torso twists
- Cossack stretch
- Arm flings

Now move onto the leg lifts series.

LEG LIFTS SERIES 1 (40 TOTAL KICKS)

This is your warm up series. Do these lifts gently, do NOT try to kick as high, as fast, or as hard as you can. Half ass them. These are gentle, "throw away" warm up sets. Restrain, don't try so hard, just go through the motions.

- Do 1 set of x10 front lifts for each leg.
- Rest approximately 45 seconds between each leg.
- Do 1 set of x10 back lifts for each leg.
- Rest approximately 45 seconds between each leg.
- Do 1 set of x10 front lifts for each leg.
- Rest approximately 45 seconds between each leg.
- Do 1 set of x10 back lifts for each leg.
- Rest a minimum of 2 minutes before proceeding to series 2.

If series 1 takes you longer than 10 minutes, then you need to half ass your kicks more to finish faster. The point of series 1 is only to get you prepared to kick as high, as fast, and as hard as you can. These are not active sets, they are not to exhaust you. That's what series 2 is for.

LEG LIFTS SERIES 2 (32 TOTAL KICKS)

This is your flexibility development series. Focus and get psyched to do these lifts high, fast, and hard. These are done aggressively, so you will do shorter sets with more rest. Work hard!

- Do 1 set of x4 front lifts for each leg. Each rep matters.
- Rest a minimum of 1 minute after doing both legs back to back.
- Do 1 set of x 4 back lifts for each leg. Each rep matters.
- Rest a minimum of 1 minute after doing both legs back to back.
- Repeat this for a total of 4 times (32 total kicks).

This should take you approximately 10-15 minutes.

Altogether, this routine should take approximately 30 minutes.

12 WEEK DYNAMIC FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM

WEEK 1 Do this at least 4 days of the week, maximum of 5 days.

WEEK 2 Do this at least 4 days of the week, maximum of 5 days.

WEEK 3 Do this at least 4 days of the week, maximum of 5 days.

WEEK 4 Do this for 6 days of the week.

WEEK 5 Do not do this at all. Reduce all of your training loads.

WEEK 6 Do this exactly 4 days of the week. No more, no less.

WEEK 7 Do this exactly 5 days of the week. No more, no less.

WEEK 8 Do this exactly 3 days of the week. No more, no less.

WEEK 9 Do this all 7 days of the week.

WEEK 10 Do not do this at all. Reduce all of your training loads.

WEEK 11 Do this 4 days of the week.

WEEK 12 Do this 2 days of the week, only on the days you feel best.

When you are done with the first 12 week cycle, you can repeat it again for continuation of dynamic flexibility development, except for one day of each week for the entire program you would have one day where you do this twice in one day. For example, in Week 1, on the second 12 week cycle, you would still do this at least 4 days of the week, but one of those days you would do this twice. It most likely shouldn't take more than two, 12 week cycles of this program to reach your own maximum amplitude for these movements if you comply and try.

OPTIMIZING THIS PROGRAM:

You can do this through soreness and, in the beginning, you will likely get sore from this. However, if you're still getting sore after 2 weeks time has passed, then you may want to back off a bit and do it less often, such as 3 days per week for the following 2 weeks. After those 2 weeks, you should recover, then you should increase the frequency again.

Dynamic flexibility training is not nearly as demanding as training isometric/weighted splits. So for Week 5 and Week 10 of this program, you reduce your training loads but it's not crucial to do a complete deload. If you do, your results will be better, but you can still train if you want. However, you should ease up slightly and not do this particular dynamic stretching workout.

Now, if you're doing too much additional training that makes your legs sore, then your results will not be as good as they would if you prioritized this program over your other training modalities. So if you're going bananas on deadlifts and leg curls, you may want to reconsider your training load on those if you really want to give your flexibility a chance to flourish.

Developing dynamic flexibility for high kicks and flying tricks is simple and not remarkably taxing. Usually you feel more refreshed than exhausted after doing this. Results come very quick, the key is a consistent volume.

What about side lifts? I did not show side lifts, but anytime during this routine, you may add in side lift stretches if you wish, or substitute one of the two lifts for the side lift if you value it more. Side lifts are helpful for groin flexibility, and if yours feels tight, then you'll want to do more of this stretch. Personally, I choose to omit the side lift because I hate it. I develop my groin flexibility through others means (cossack stretches and side split work). Also, at anytime, you may replace your front lift stretches with outside or inside crescent kicks since they are more relevant to the practice of tricking kicks.

What about combining this program with The splits routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs? You can do both at the same time, they will compliment each other. If, however,

you feel the flexibility training load is too high, use some common sense and reduce the total number of workouts. Whichever type of training you choose to reduce, please expect a decrease in speed of results for that type of flexibility (e.g., less splits workouts = slower results on splits. Less kicks = slower results on kicks).

If your range of motion in these stretches is still poor after 12 weeks, here are a few considerations: 1) If you're too fat, your gut will get in the way of your lifting leg (in front lifts). 2) If your legs are too big, your quads will hit your torso and block further ranges of motion (in front lifts). 3) If you're too old and have lead a long life of stiffness and inflexibility, then the quality and state of your muscle tissue may be such that your flexibility will always be poor no matter what you do. However, at least after doing this routine, it should improve tremendously! I wouldn't use the age excuse for dynamic flexibility until you are in your late 40s.

TACTICAL TRICKING FLEXIBILITY

Now that we covered the basics, there are a few more things to consider. With your end goal in mind, determine if there are any supplementary stretches needed for things like ankles, feet, wrists, fingers, and neck. For example, if you want to back handspring comfortably, then you will want some wrist flexibility.

So you would find or create some wrist stretches that assist with this skill. Read Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises for help with exercise selection. Do the same thing for any trick you're looking to learn: backflip, 540 kick, butterfly twist, raiz, gainer, etc.

AN IMPORTANT JUJIMUFU DYNAMIC FLEXIBILITY TRICK

Most people do their kick tricks with hook kicks, and combo their tricks with spin hook kick transitions. I don't. I have almost exclusively used the crescent kick instead of the hook kick in tricking. Here is a crescent kick:

Why have I been using the crescent kick? It's just what I started with and it became a habit. Later, I realized crescent kicks were disadvantageous in tricking. You see, hook kicks are much better for generating and maintaining momentum in a tricking combo than a crescent kick. Here is a hook kick from a spin setup:

The hook kick, from any setup, "carries you" through a combo better than any crescent kick could. This is why almost every elite kick trickster uses hook kicks for combo'ing rather than crescent kicks. Here's an example of what I'm talking about: here is a video by Scott Skelton posted in 2008, tricking's first dub_dub, a major piece of tricking history.

And here we can review his setup: he used a very low hook kick to get the momentum for that combo.

Scott is a personal friend of mine and I have tremendous respect for him. I'm not saying this is bad what he's doing, it's actually the best way to do what he wanted to do! I'm just pointing it out as a common example: as tricksters get in the habit of doing low, swift hook kicks for maximum momentum, they are prioritizing momentum over flexibility. Essentially, they could kick higher. However, the hook kick, as a tricking combo transition, works best when the kick height is not too high. No really, if you try to kick too high in a hook kick during a combo, then it won't be as effective for generating that powerful side momentum. The lower hook kicks generate much more "whip"… but it is not going to stimulate flexibility development.

The crescent kick is the better kick for flexibility development. The technique of the crescent kick has a greater potential range of motion than a hook kick, and thus has more potential for stimulating flexibility development. Basically it "stretches" you more. And when used in a tricking combo as a transition, a high crescent kick will not slow you down compared to a low crescent kick. In which case, you can kick as high as you're able to with it, if you use it in a combo. But inevitably, the crescent kick is a poor substitute for generating side momentum compared to a hook kick.

Since I do all of my kicking tricks with a crescent kick, and use crescent kicks over the hook kick as a combo transition, and am always doing them with as much height as I can, I'm stimulating flexibility development often while I practice my tricking. This is at the expense of maximum side momentum in tricking combos. I'm okay with this, why? Because I like the look of crescent kicks and I like flexibility! This is a Jujimufu tricking flexibility secret: I use crescent kicks when I trick!

If you're a trickster looking for more flexibility, make a serious consideration in favor of implementing more crescent kicks into your practice. Besides, crescent kicks are pretty exotic nowadays because so few people use them in tricking. Be different. Stand out. Be flexible. Use crescent kicks regularly in your tricking practice!

If you want to enhance your tricking flexibility further, then use the splits routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs. Also, you should learn, master, and use the aerial often. See this video about the aerial and tricking:

JUJIMUFU - THE BEST TRICK FOR FLEXIBILITY GAINS

ROUTINE 3: Ass to grass squats

When you master the ass to grass squat, your life will finally make sense. It is the most "functional" position, and it has the carryover you would want for pretty much all other movements that matter to you. Everyone should be able to do it, for basic health reasons at least! Here are a few ideas about getting your squat "ass to grass" in the following video:

JUJIMUFU - SCREW THE 30/30 SQUAT CHALLENGE

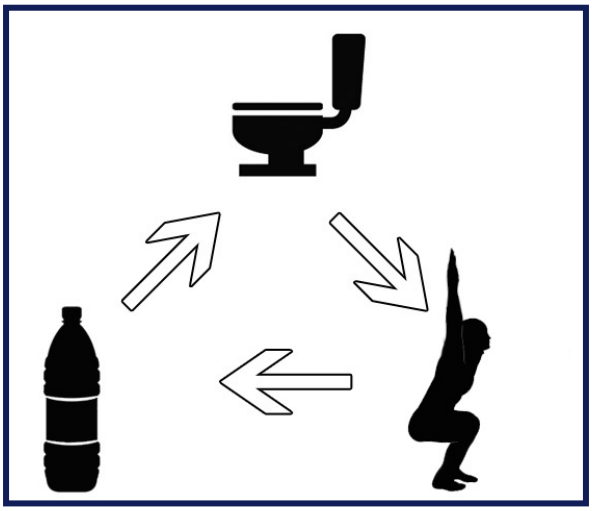
In this video, my friend and I discuss methods of building your ass to grass squat. We both agree that the best way to get there is to practice it holistically, and use your body's feedback during this holistic practice to target weak points. When you find weak points, supplement with stretches that follow the rules in Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises. Do that, and keep increasing your squatting volume. The ultimate key to ass to grass squats is more squatting with the intention to squat ass to grass!

In contrast to this method, there are now things such as 30 day squat challenges that challenge you to sit in a squat position for 30 minutes per day for 30 consecutive days. I've been asked about this a lot, some people find it novel to combine this challenge with everyday needs, like eating!

This challenge "sounds" good, but I don't think it's the best option if you literally do nothing but sit at the bottom for the whole 30 minutes. It doesn't address the one key component for building an ass to grass squat: movement. Rather than sit at the bottom of the squat for 30 minutes, why not just do 5-8 sets of squats with rest periods for a 30 minute total time period? Do these sets mindfully, thoughtfully, and carefully. Really try to squat better. The results will be superior compared to if you just spent 30 minutes sitting at the bottom of a squat. If a 30/30 squat challenge sounds attractive, it's only because it has the promise of doing other things while you're squatting… like eating or reading. Why not just do squats for real, with real sets and hey, how about some weight? And then walk around and/or do whatever you want during the rest periods? The simplest way, and best squat for this, would be a goblet squat. Dan John figured this one out from training his athletes for decades. Grab a dumbbell or kettlebell and just "practice" squatting up and down while holding it between your legs.

Keep the weight close and use your elbows to drive your knees out in order to sit in between your legs. Don't be afraid to squirm, bend, and explore ranges of motion. Strive to keep your back upright.

Here's another option: my Pee Squat Drink routine.



Here's how to do it:

- Pee.
- Overhead squat deep and slow 5 to 10 times, preferentially holding something overhead that weighs 15-45 lbs (7-20 kgs).
- Drink 8 to 16 oz of water (250-500 mL).
- Repeat.

So that's really it. If you want deeper squats, you need to squat deep, often, and actually care about doing it right and doing it a lot! I'm convinced that most people who can't squat deep just don't squat often enough or don't care enough about squatting deep. If they cared, they'd squat more and try harder to go deeper. The Pee Squat Drink gets you squatting deep at regular intervals during the day, but like any routine, it's not going to work unless you care.

#Realtalk: squatting deep is really easy. Even really old and relatively active grandmas and grandpas, and starving people in 3rd world countries who don't workout, can do it deep. Why? Because they just do it. If you can't, and you really want to, then go back and reread Part I, Step 3: Brute Force 1000 reps. No excuses.

ROUTINE 4: The best upper body flexibility developer

For the lower body, we have high kicks and splits for benchmarks of success, which we use to measure our flexibility level. But for the upper body, there really are no *popular* benchmarks like these to measure our flexibility level against. Sure, there are things that are extreme, like this insane weighted bridge variation:

I watched Jamie (@acro69) warm up for this for almost an hour before he let me stand on him here. Basically he just brute forced the position further and further with lots of sets, and lots of rest between those sets, until he could go this far. However, although this is insane, it's not a *popular* benchmark for flexibility like the full splits.

So, since the popular standards don't exist here, that makes upper body flexibility goals more ambiguous, but that doesn't mean they aren't important. It's not usually a position you want for its own sake, like the splits, deep squats, or high kicks. It's usually comfort in certain activities that we want upper body flexibility for, whether that's abdominal flexibility for acrobatics, shoulder flexibility for pressing, or wrist flexibility for front rack barbell position. The common theme here is, and the goal you should be striving for is: COMFORT!

Now, besides this bridge example, and the wrists (which are quite easy to stretch, just do it), one piece of equipment can handle most of our other movements and positions for upper body flexibility. That even includes the ones we don't even know we could benefit from. Gymnastic rings.

I'm a huge fan of ring training. Ever since I started using them in 2010, when I was 24 years old, I've been seeing a great change. It's improved my physique, my strength in and out of the weight room on all movements, and it's had unbelievable carry over to my tricking skills. The rings are, and always will be, a staple in my training. And in the context of flexibility, they are the best overall piece of upper body flexibility development equipment around. Rapid, substantial, fun, comfortable, and sustainable flexibility improvement can be achieved with a pair of rings. Rings also develop flexibility in a way that uses all 4 rules in Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises, staying true to our guidelines. Here are some examples of positions that you can achieve with the rings that will have a tremendous impact on your upper body flexibility.

Deep dips, deep push ups, and a deep stance for chest and shoulder flexibility.

Leaning into a deep fly and figuring out ways to combine and combo chest and back stretches.

Reaching and leaning into some abdominal and lat stretches.

Getting fancy with some compound stretches that get the lower body involved a bit.

The skin the cat is one of the coolest shoulder stretches in existence.

When working the rings for flexibility, be sure to use movement and tension to your advantage. Having to support a stretch on the rings by resisting motion activates that tension. Basically, you have to move against the rings in a stretch to keep from swinging around or collapsing. That creates the tension, and that tension combined with the stretch increases flexibility in the way that will increase comfort in athletic activities.

Now, that doesn't mean all motion is bad. I love swinging around and combo'ing stretches on the rings, moving from one position to another. Sometimes I do it in constant motion, with short stops here and there when I find the good spots, and this motion helps you find those good spots!

The difficult part about this type of flexibility work is tracking it. In Part II, Collection 2: Tracking, I discussed counting sets, reps, and rest periods as an important means of increasing flexibility training productivity. Unfortunately, playing on the rings in this way doesn't lend itself easily to tracking. If you want to track this, I recommend just writing down:

- When and how much time you spent playing on the rings.
- How you felt, noting any tight areas or any positions that increased in comfort.

After consistently using the rings this way for a few months (perhaps a summer block?), note any changes in how you feel during your training. The goal is comfortable upper body

flexibility. Playing around on a pair of rings, entering and exiting points of discomfort, and finding points of relief will accomplish this. If you really want to supercharge your upper body flexibility comfort, then, in addition to this ring work, you should start doing some of the swing and twist exercises mentioned in High kicks and flying tricks routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Program. If you don't have a pair of rings, you still have options. I recommend bands, sticks, and stretching against fixed beams and bars. Review Part I, Step 5: Build your flexibility toolkit for some ideas.

However, if you have money to spend and really want to take this to the next level, try a Cross Core from www.crosscore.com. It emulates what rings and TRX bands accomplish, except the pulley system allows for full rotation.

I met the inventor of the Crosscore at a fitness exhibition and after playing with it myself, and watching him play with it, I was convinced that this thing beats the rings for mobility work! The "free pulley" system allows a huge variety of movements that rings don't. I bugged him for hours about it, I was obsessed, that's why I put it in this book. Here are a couple example movements you can achieve on this that you cannot achieve on rings.

See how the pulley allows body rotation? This dramatically increases the number of potential movements and positions compared to fixed rings or straps.

The Crosscore also lends itself better to combo'ing stretches than rings.

There are positions and sequences you can do with a Crosscore that you simply cannot do with rings. Also, you can feel out certain stretches much more effectively.

I fell in love with it and asked the makers if I could have a discount code for the people reading this book who might want to use it for their upper body flexibility work. On www.crosscore.com, use discount code JUJIMUFU for 15% off of a Crosscore.

UPPER BODY FLEXIBILITY TRAINING FREQUENCY

Unless you have a difficult and specific goal which will take a lot of dedication, time, and consolidated, emotional effort (e.g. an extreme bridge), then just supplement your training with this upper body "play" style of flexibility work as much as you want. I do it everyday, in some way, with some structure, usually for 10 minute blocks of time, but sometimes more if it just feels too good to stop. I don't always use rings or the Crosscore, but I'd recommend going out of your way to get either or both of them. They are truly the fast track to excellent upper body mobility/flexibility and health.

Now that we've discussed this freestyle movement approach to upper body flexibility, could we not do this with the lower body as well? Of course! And I do it everyday. Read on.

ROUTINE 5: Jujimufu's universal flexibility routine

This final routine is the full body version of my Upper body flexibility routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs. What is this universal flexibility routine for? It's for developing and maintaining a certain acceptable level of general movement flexibility that will provide a valuable carryover needed for… being a human! More importantly, feeling a sense of relief, comfort, and capability in your essential movement patterns (squatting, leaning, reaching, bending, arching, elongating, turning, you name it!). This routine is my foundation for all my other feats of flexibility. From years of experience, I've pretty much stripped it to the essentials and do a lot of those essentials. If you've ever spent any amount of time with me during training, you'll recognize these movements. They are my habits, I do them all the time.

JUJIMUFU - UNIVERSAL FLEXIBILITY ROUTINE

The previous video illustrates a spartan, equipment free version of my universal warmup. I highly recommend practicing these movements using a structure to help you instead. Please look at this video of my buddy Tanner Hodge doing something similar in a power rack with a barbell. I call this fidget stretching, and I do this kind of stuff all the time too:

JUJIMUFU - BARBELL STRETCHES WITH TANNER HODGE

Basically, you squat, bend, and move around in constant motion, looking for the tight spots. It looks like you're fidgeting around from stretch to stretch. It should begin feeling good relatively soon after starting. The longer you've been sitting on your butt, or the more sore you are, the longer it takes to get into "the zone".

Here are the basic movements that my universal flexibility routine is based around:

- Squatting
- Cossack stretching
- Warrior lunging
- Extending the spine
- Twisting
- Bending
- Reaching
- Kicking
- etc.

Here are some suggestions:

- These do not have to be done in any particular order.
- These are not done for X amount of reps or sets. Although, I generally spend 20 minutes doing this daily, usually before training.
- Stay in constant motion and move in and out of the positions. It's best to combo these movements. What you should be doing is *fidgeting* around.
- Do not pause for more than a couple seconds at any range of motion.
- You should actually be feeling blood flow to the muscles as you do this. A very mild muscle pump is possible.
- Rely on support initially, but then wean yourself off of it. Afterward, begin using a structure to increase the difficulty.
- Add in a rest period of 2-3 minutes every 10 minutes or so, even if you aren't feeling any fatigue.

Let's start with the cossack stretch. Start here and just go down on one side.

This is also an ankle/foot stretch for the bent leg. When you're doing this stretch, keep moving. Slight bounces in the stretched positions are helpful. Go ahead and move all around.

When you do this stretch and switch back and forth, keep your back as upright as possible.

Also, try pushing your hips out forward and reaching overhead.
This is also a thoracic spine stretch.

Essentially, it's a groin stretch with positions and movements that stretch almost everything else too. Keep moving, don't sit in one position too long here. Use slow and controlled switching between sides. You're basically doing stretch combos.

Now you can start most of these warm up exercises by supporting yourself by holding onto something or resting your hands on the ground or on your own body. However, you will want to always progress to removing support and perhaps adding weight. Here you can start the cossack stretch by supporting yourself by putting your hands on the ground and on your own leg.

But then work towards removing that support.

Perhaps adding weight.

I recommend following a progression like this with basic motions in and out of the stretched position. Remember to start with support and end with you supporting something. Exceptions might include dynamic kicking and dynamic twisting. Support is not usually helpful in these cases. In fact, it could be dangerous.

For example, dynamic twisting stretches should always be done standing:

Not seated. You want the spine to move freely this way during dynamic movements. You don't want it locked up from sitting your butt on the ground, this could cause back problems. Sure, you *could* get away with these seated dynamic twisting stretches, especially when you're younger, but the reward doesn't really justify the risk in my opinion.

Here's another stretch in this routine, the warrior lunge. It is one of my favorite stretches. It is the entry movement for front splits, and really an overall all-star, super-duper, ultimate, omega-mega-ultra legendary stretch that helps with everything. It's always the first stretch I teach and discuss during my seminars, and I always have participants work it with me so they understand its value.

Simply go into a lunge, knee over foot. Reach and turn to add a little more to it.

Do both the above variation with knee over foot and the below variation with knee behind foot. Both are useful, so practice both.

Try turning your upper body across your front knee. This stretches the rear hip more (and your abdominals too). I recommend moving deep into the warrior lunge stretch and back out slowly for reps, instead of just holding it for time. If you do it right, you'll get a little leg pump and some mild muscle fatigue. Don't just do it, practice it with the intention to improve.

Overhead reaching and bending stretches don't just feel good in the morning, they feel good all day long!

Don't forget to watch my thoracic extension video for stretching the back in a way you cannot stretch without the assistance of equipment (a cylindrical pipe in this case):

JUJIMUFU - BEST SUPPLEMENTARY STRETCH EVER

Somewhere at the end of the warm up, I add in kicking, but only if I'm about to do more kicks or do tricks that have kicks. If this is what I need, I do front lifts:

The lifting leg starts behind you. This allows you to use momentum and increase the amplitude of the stretch.

Keep your hands up, keep your legs straight, step forward and kick up! You can use a hand as a target if it helps you focus. Maintain the best posture you can. Your base heel should ideally be flat on the ground but it is okay if it pivots to the outside or lifts a bit. Begin the lift as high as feels comfortable, lifting the leg directly in front of you.

I would also incorporate a knee up stretch.

Why should you do the knee up if you're already doing front lifts? Because it will stretch you more in certain areas of the upper back of the leg. It's also good for knee health. So do both.

For the acrobatic athlete/trickster, you can eventually substitute front lifts with crescent kick or spin kicks exclusively if you wish. But I still do both myself. See High kicks and flying tricks routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs for more information on kicking flexibility and more dynamic kick stretches.

You should feel refreshed and warmed up after this. It's basic movement pattern development and maintenance. It's movement exploration and it's fun! The more you do this routine, the better you'll be at "sports" and life. It's not hard, progress is measured by quality of movement improvement in your sport or quality of life. And this routine sort of comes full circle with the very first sentence in this book in Part I, Step 1: Live the flexibility lifestyle:

> "The most important step you can take toward legendary flexibility development is to move into and out of the most stable, full range of motion positions possible every time you move."

That's what you're practicing here. You're training for moving into and out of the most stable, full range of motion positions possible. You're training the way you *move* so you can move this way all the time, so you can live the flexibility lifestyle. This is the foundation of legendary flexibility: relearning basic human movement patterns and working them through their maxi-

mum ranges of motion. It isn't hard, it's actually super easy and feels great. And it's going to be what you need if you ever want to do something like full splits, high kicks, or strength tricks that require a high level of mobility. This high mobility movement is your foundation, your bread 'n butter, and it'll increase your longevity with training as you get older.

You have to get up off your butt and stop saying "I'll start stretching one day"… You have to stop thinking that stretching and flexibility is nothing but butterfly groin stretches and sitting hamstring stretches. It's not, and I really never do these stretches myself!

Get up, get moving, and use this routine to start moving through your full ranges of motion, now! Then go back through this book for inspiration on how to invent your own flexibility exercises and optimize your flexibility training in the most cunning of ways. Stretch everyday like me, for the rest of your life! The flexibility lifestyle is awesome!

CONCLUSION

Flexibility is a rich training topic, no single person could ever say everything that could be said about it. Everybody has their own perspective on the topic. My perspective is unique enough that I felt I had to write this book.

The problem with flexibility training in physical culture is that it is disproportionately represented by certain stereotypes. This includes: sterile physical therapists who are overly cautious, yogi practitioners who are often unnecessarily gentle and may have spiritual agendas, and meathead bodybuilders who take a certain neglectful pride in not being able to put sunscreen on their own backs because they have mass. Oh, did I mention that putting sunscreen on your own back is one of the best ways to stretch your upper body? It meets all of my criteria for selecting flexibility exercises back in Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises… Forgot to mention that one I guess.

My objectives in this book were to 1) make you aware of the pervasiveness of flexibility in everything we do everyday in our lives and in training, and 2) put a voice to the type of flexibility training that has the most passion. I'm very passionate about flexibility training because of my perspective, and so I had to name it Legendary Flexibility because legends are stories of passion told with great care and enthusiasm.

We approach our highest intensity moments in training with a life or death, do or die, mentality. Yet, we never do this for flexibility training. We don't think to do so, but I did, and now you will too. If at any time you forget what really effective flexibility training looks like, just imagine what a max lift looks like, or imagine what it looks like when someone prepares to jump across one building's rooftop to another. Imagine stepping up on stage in front of thousands of people to perform feats of flexibility. Anything that requires that level of extreme focus and emotional effort, you gotta put some of *that* into your flexibility training. You need to get psyched up, crank up some music that makes you want to move, snap an ammonia inhalant, get freaky, and really hit your flexibility goals hard. Hit them as hard as you would for any other peak physical skill in your favorite sport. Stop being victim to "not knowing" how to get flexible. You get flexible by doing it hard, smart, and weird. This book has what you need to do that, now use the information here in your fight for flexibility.

APPENDIX I
FLEXIBILITY Q&A

COULD MY GENETICS BE HOLDING ME BACK?

Flexibility is the biomotor skill least influenced by genetics. My dad is the most inflexible man in the world. He's an ultramarathoner, meaning he's constantly training in shortened ranges of motion. He can't even touch his shins, let alone his toes, without bending his knees.

So this guy is father to one of the most flexible guys in the world (me). You may feel discouraged about your genetics for things like building muscle with the size of your bone structure (check the size of your wrist circumference) or for things like tricking if you are too tall (shorter people excel at tricking). However, as far as flexibility goes, I chose not to blame genetics. I believe that, yes, while some people are naturally more flexible than others, the difference isn't significant until you begin comparing the peak flexibility displays of world class contortionists.

As a case in point, gymnastics schools in China generally skip teaching specific routines to their students in favor of focusing on strength and flexibility development. They then take the best students to either train toward the Olympics or to develop circus acts. These students are the elite. However, even among the non-elite, and even among the average and below average students, almost all develop the splits. Why? It's primarily because China, in general, trains harder and smarter in gymnastics than most (if not all) other countries.

AM I TOO OLD TO BE FLEXIBLE?

You're never too old to develop your flexibility to the point where you'd experience a dramatic increase in your quality of life. Your joints and movements will feel better, and your ability to function in the general sense will be better. It would only take a couple months of repatterning your movements and doing some general flexibility exercises that aren't too much hassle to expect this improvement. Supplement with some of the special massage exercises in Kelley Starret's book in the recommended books section to jumpstart the process. It's definitely worth it, having good flexibility is something you don't realize has so much benefit until you have it at your disposal every day. However, most people who ask me the question "Am I too old to be flexible?" really often mean "Am I too old to accomplish the goal of attaining the full splits?".

AM I TOO OLD TO ACHIEVE FULL SPLITS?

If you've lead mostly a sedentary life, then from my observation, you would be facing increased difficulty in achieving full splits at around age 35+. If you've been active but have never trained flexibility directly, then you would probably be facing increased difficulty at age 45+.

The program in this book, The splits routine in Part III, Flexibility Training Programs, could take 2-3 times as long to see the final result as a younger person would with increased age or lack of training experience. If you're not yet in your late 30s, and you're active, then age isn't an excuse. You can get your splits, don't be scared, get to work!

I GET A PAIN IN THE FRONT OF MY HIPS ON THE SIDE SPLIT. ARE MY HIPS DEFORMED?

If you can do this with each leg, one at a time, then you aren't deformed:

You can do it both legs at the same time if you can do it with each leg one at a time. The pain in the front of the hips is normal, although unique and particularly bad. Read more about this here in this book.

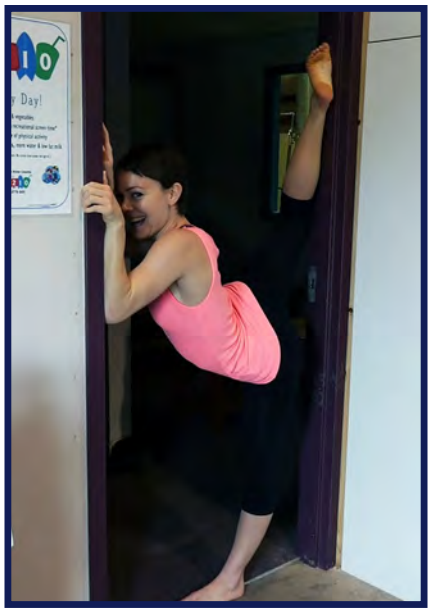
ARE GIRLS REALLY MORE FLEXIBLE THAN GUYS?

Sort of… It's quite complicated.

On average, females have wider hips than males. This inclines females in general to be better at front splits, as well as both external & internal rotation of the hips stretches, than males, yet it inclines males to be better at middle splits than females. Also, on average, females have longer legs in proportion to their upper body than males. This inclines females in general to be better at back bending & front bending than males, yet it inclines males in general to be better at pikes than females. Finally, on average, females have narrower shoulders than males. The implications of this is more complicated, but for the most part, it inclines females in general to be better at most types of shoulder flexibility you'd use in conventional gymnastics, yet it inclines males to be better at some more unconventional types of shoulder stretches (e.g. which you might see in yoga, contortion, or dance).

With this being said, remember, we defined flexibility as a complex in this book, it involves strength and coordination (control). Guys are typically stronger than girls, giving them more potential to support loaded stretches, that makes them better equipped for something like weighted splits. And guys are usually bigger, and have more muscle and "stuff" that get in the way when they try to stretch.

So here's a case in point. This is Taylor Bradow doing an upright split stretch. A guy doing this would have a harder time because there are more "muscles" that would hinder the range of motion, and for the aforementioned reasons, as a female, she is better at back bending stretches and front split positions.



So here we go. I would find it impossible to achieve the position she's achieved in this back bridge because of the amount of muscle I have. In contrast, she would find it impossible to support the amount of weight I'm supporting in the splits. So who's more flexible, girls or guys? Depends on the flexibility goal!

One more thing: it's a misconception that size always hinders flexibility. Sure, there is some absolute resistance with my muscles getting in each other's way (so I can't do the bridge worth a crap!). However, my big muscles are very strong, and I trick, so I'm very coordinated, and strength and coordination are necessary for flexibility. Overall, I find the splits and flexibility training easier now, at my age of 30 and my weight of 235 lbs (107 kgs), than I did when I was 18 and 185 lbs (84 kgs). Why? Because I'm stronger! And strength matters!

OVERFLEXIBILITY?

I've seen some people worry about overflexibility before they can even touch their toes! But what is overflexibility? Practically, it's defined as having flexibility in ranges of motion you lack control (strength and coordination), or being unable to resist entering a range of motion because of lack of control (accidentally going too far into a stretch and hurting yourself). Why is overflexibility bad? Because it often means weakness and injury. So a lot of people worry that too many stretches will make them "overflexible". They worry it's going to make them weak and floppy. In my experience, overflexibility problems are mythical. I've been around some sickeningly flexible males who are incredibly strong and who have oversplits. Trust me, overflexibility is not as common or even as bad as people make it out to be. But don't worry, brute forcing your goal with psychotic drive will not get you overflexible like these peers of mine I've observed, unless you're stretching up to and usually over 4 hours a day like some of these guys...

People who are afraid of becoming "overflexible" by doing half an hour of stretching a day are the same people who are afraid of "getting too big" when they take creatine supplements or whey protein supplements. It's laughable! Like you're just going to wake up one day and be "too big" on accident from taking some protein powder and an amino acid product. Similarly, like you're just going to wake up one day and be "too flexible" on accident from stretching longer the night before.

Don't even worry about overflexibility. Even if you had this problem, it's a good problem to have, and an easy one to fix if it gets really out of hand (just flex your muscles when you stretch! Haven't I said that like dozens of times in this book already?).

STRETCHING ORDER WITHIN A WORKOUT?

In Correctly sequence your flexibility work within a workout and week in Part II, Collection 4: Programming, I dispelled some myths and misconceptions about sequencing stretching exercises during a workout. After reading that, you should no longer need to wonder how to sequence your stretches in a workout.

STRETCHING WHEN SORE? IS IT OKAY?

Watch the following video for a discussion on this topic:

JUJIMUFU - STRETCHING WHEN YOU'RE SORE

HOW COME SOME DAYS I'M FLEXIBLE AND SOME DAYS I'M NOT?

If you were to plot your athletic performance in terms of strength, explosiveness, training motivation, and your flexibility performance over a month, the curves would be the same. In other words, the day you would set a new personal record on a lift, or the day you would throw your best acrobatic tricks, is the same exact day that your flexibility would be its best. Any day I've ever set a PR on a lift and decided to train the splits afterward, I had my splits working good! The inverse is true. The days you feel weak, slow, or uncoordinated are also the days your flexibility will be a struggle. What do we do with this knowledge? It's obvious, we train flexibility with the same acknowledgment of fluctuation and with the same respect for variation of the parameters as any other form of training. We also strategically program our flexibility training with effective use of periodization in order to avoid bad workouts and plateaus. Finally, we consider prioritizing it so that we don't just train flexibility after we crush the weights or flip out. Read Periodize your flexibility training by prioritizing it in Part II, Collection 4: Programming for more information.

WHAT IF I GET HURT STRETCHING?

Hurt? Why are we so afraid of pain these days? Haven't you ever had a pain that has come and stuck around for a few days, or a week or so, and then disappeared on its own? You kept saying, "man I really should do something about this", but then half a month passes and it just goes away on its own. Whatever happened to just ignoring things like this? These days, people panic like crazy with every little tweak and discomfort they experience. So what's this have to do with flexibility? Why am I getting worked up?

I'm getting worked up here because I've noticed people whine way more when it comes to flexibility training than other kinds of physical training. I've seen someone plow through a chest workout, jack up their shoulder, and then finish the workout while working around their pain, like a real warrior. Despite that, I'll see that "warrior" do some intermediate level stretching exercises, like a straddle stretch, and they whine, bitch, and worry about every little tightness that jumps up at them. Whatever happened to just continuing to work when pain happens? And letting all of this resolve itself on its own? I miss that. Why not give it a shot when you're putting in your 1000 reps of flexibility work? If you feel an ache come on,

why not just see if it'll go away after rest and an extra warm up set, before you stop everything you're doing and start exchanging your hard work for excuses.

HOW SHOULD YOU BREATHE WHEN YOU STRETCH?

The best way to breath is to be aware of it, that's all. Just don't hold your breath unless you need to maintain some sort of intra-abdominal pressure to support weight or resist tension. For example, when you do back squats with your maximum weight, you don't breathe in and out during the lift, you breathe in big before you squat down, then you breathe out back at the top of the lift or on the way up out of the hole. You need the intra-abdominal pressure to support you during the lift, that's why you sort of "hold your breath" during a portion of the lift.

So no funny business with flexibility training. If the stretch involves a lot of muscular tension, then there must be some sort of intra-abdominal support assisting you. In that case, it'll help to breathe in big and only breathe out once the tension evolves to allow you to breathe again. If you're doing relaxed stretches, which involve little tension at all, it'll help immediately to be mindful of your breathing, like it would if you were meditating. So breathing while stretching isn't complicated, that's all there is to it.

HOW DO I KNOW I'M PICKING THE RIGHT STRETCHES?

Choose flexibility exercises that meet all the criteria in Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises. Do that, then pay attention to how your body responds to your selection. You want exercises that are challenging and that get better with more sets. They should just feel "right"… It really is as intuitive as that.

WHAT ARE THE BEST STRETCHING EXERCISES?

It depends on your goal and your state. First, follow the 4 rules in Part I, Step 4: Choose the right supplementary flexibility exercises. But then after you do that, everyday should be different. Consider if you want to increase your deadlift max. Do you train the same exercises all the time? Not if you want to be a professional. Pro deadlifters vary their deadlifting (load, reps, sets, platforms, chains, bands, stances, grips, etc.). They also use auxiliary exercises to supplement the development of that lift when needed (rack pulls, glute ham raises, front squats, etc.). They follow a general criteria that all lifters follow for selecting their exercises. However, once they gain experience, they develop a personal criteria for what they choose to do. Whether it's shoring up weaknesses, or just avoiding a certain exercise because it's never worked for them, you must do the same with your stretches.

So in short, for the best stretching exercise, just stick to my 4 rules. That's your general criteria, and then after that, you get personal. Figure out which stretches within that framework usually work well for you. The best stretching exercises are always personal, and always vary over time.

I'M STRETCHING A LOT BUT AM NOT GETTING MORE FLEXIBLE. HELP!?

Not doing stretching exercises is not the only reason for being inflexible. You won't get flexible just by stretching, just as you won't get shredded just by lifting weights. To get shredded, you have to fuel your body right, you have to recover, and you have to make your training work. This book has everything you need to make your flexibility training work. However, if you only train your flexibility 10 to 30 minutes a day and then eat poorly and sit on your butt for 8+ hours a day, it's no wonder you aren't getting more flexible!

Flexibility is not a biomotor characteristic that is excused from living a healthy lifestyle. Be active, eat well, recover well, and use the guidelines I've given you in this book. You will get more flexible. If you have real pain while you stretch that goes beyond discomfort, something that feels like an injury, you should also check out Kelley Starret's book to rule out soft tissue restrictions.

HOW DO YOU STAY MOTIVATED TO STRETCH?

I'll answer this question as if it was personal to me (Jujimufu).

First, I stretch everyday, I live the flexibility lifestyle. Any lifestyle is a kind of skill, and you can always level up a skill. My movement "habits" have me on autopilot for enhancing my flexibility just by sheer existence. It's who I am. I need no motivation to exist, I just do. So when I move throughout my day, I stretch whenever I move, without thinking about it or needing motivation. I just do, out of habit.

Second, anything you are good at is inevitably more fun than anything you suck at. I'm really, really good at stretching, because I've been training it for so long and with such care and intention. I've figured out, and apply all of this awesome stuff I've written in this book for myself, and I get BIG results from following my own advice. If you train your flexibility with as much care and intention as I have been doing, using the things I've shared in this book, for at least a little while, you'll see it's less a matter of motivation and more just something you'd wonder why you'd ever live without again.

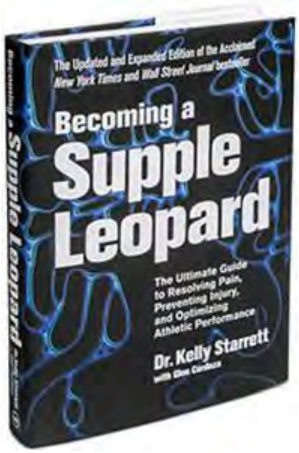
Finally, flexibility is not typically a thing of preference. People's preferences are typically governed by the environment they grow up in and their genetics. If they grow up with people who like strength sports, and they are blessed with a body that is super strong, they will gravitate towards that. Flexibility is not typically governed strongly by genetics like other biomotor skills, so there is no reason why anyone's preference would be less than the person next to them. In which case, there is no reason for me or you to particularly be unmotivated!

I have noticed in male culture, flexibility is not prized like strength or size, but it's equivocally respected whenever a male achieves a high level in it. I have, so the respect from my peers motivates me too.

I hope this book has opened your eyes to the possibilities of flexibility training. It's really quite awesome and is becoming more and more indispensable with the direction the sporting world is going. Once you recognize its awesomeness, and practice it in the ways I cover in this book, you won't need to be motivated to train it, because you won't want to live without it!

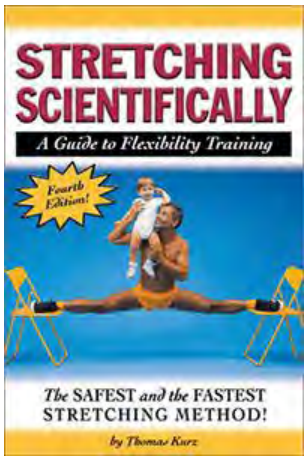
JUJIMUFU-APPROVED FLEXIBILITY BOOKS

BECOMING A SUPPLE LEOPARD



Kelly Starrett completely changed the mobility training game. His practices and methods are seen in gyms across the world now, all because of his book. I recommend this to older athletes, and athletes suffering from chronic pain in certain areas that are impeding range of motion. I also recommend it to any athlete that participates in very repetitive, shortened range of motion activities (such as bicyclists or hockey players who spend most of their training time in hunched over positions). His methods will get you on the fast track to remedying underlying problems that would hold you back from making flexibility gains.

STRETCHING SCIENTIFICALLY



Thomas Kurz's book popularized isometric stretching methods. His book is a classic. If you want to read about the science of what is actually happening to your body when you stretch, the nervous system and muscular cells for example, and how to use that knowledge to optimize flexibility training, then you will love this book. This book was the most influential and important flexibility book I read.

CREDIT

WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

I want to thank my friend Sebastián Franchini (sebazebes@gmail.com) for the **cover artwork** and a selection of original sketches featured throughout the book. Your cover artwork commission was a super strong motivating factor for me to finish this book!

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I want thank my friend Corey Diamond (@coreydiamond) for the **video support**. The time you took to travel to help film and support me in producing the critical videos that go with this book was undoubtedly a key factor in this book getting finished.

I want to thank my parents and wife for **showing strong enthusiasm** for what I do. I know you guys think my flexibility stuff is awesome because you tell me all the time how proud you are of me! And I want to thank all my followers for **expressing approval for my crazy antics**! I love you guys!

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