# PNF Stretching Explained - Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation

## Learn how to use PNF Stretching to take your Flexibility to the next level.

**What is PNF Stretching?**

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF) is a more advanced form of flexibility training that involves both the stretching and contraction of the muscle group being targeted.

PNF stretching was originally developed as a form of rehabilitation, and to that effect it is very effective. It is also excellent for targeting specific muscle groups, and as well as increasing flexibility, it also improves muscular strength.

**A Word of Warning!**

Certain precautions need to be taken when performing PNF stretches as they can put added stress on the targeted muscle group, which can increase the risk of soft tissue injury. To help reduce this risk, it is important to include a conditioning phase before a maximum, or intense effort is used.

Also, before undertaking any form of stretching it is vitally important that a thorough warm up be completed. Warming up prior to stretching does a number of beneficial things, but primarily its purpose is to prepare the body and mind for more strenuous activity. One of the ways it achieves this is by helping to increase the body's core temperature while also increasing the body's muscle temperature. This is essential to ensure the maximum benefit is gained from your stretching. Click here for a detailed explanation of [how, why and when to perform your warm up](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/warm-up.php).

**How to perform a PNF stretch?**

The process of performing a PNF stretch involves the following. The muscle group to be stretched is positioned so that the muscles are stretched and under tension. The individual then contracts the stretched muscle group for 5 - 6 seconds while a partner, or immovable object, applies sufficient resistance to inhibit movement. Please note; the effort of contraction should be relevant to the level of conditioning.

The contracted muscle group is then relaxed and a controlled stretch is applied for about 20 to 30 seconds. The muscle group is then allowed 30 seconds to recover and the process is repeated 2 - 4 times. Refer to the diagrams below for a visual example.

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| pnf-stretch taken from The Stretching Handbook | The athlete and partner assume the position for the stretch, and then the partner extends the body limb until the muscle is stretched and tension is felt. |
| pnf-stretch taken from The Stretching Handbook | The athlete then contracts the stretched muscle for 5 - 6 seconds and the partner must inhibit all movement. (The force of the contraction should be relevant to the condition of the muscle. For example, **if the muscle has been injured, do not apply a maximum contraction**). |
| pnf-stretch taken from The Stretching Handbook | The muscle group is relaxed, then immediately and cautiously pushed past its normal range of movement for about 20 to 30 seconds. Allow 30 seconds recovery before repeating the procedure 2 - 4 times. |

Information differs slightly about timing recommendations for PNF stretching depending on who you are talking to. Although there are conflicting responses to the question of *how long should I contract the muscle group for* and *how long should I rest for between each stretch*, I believe (through a study of research literature and personal experience) that the above timing recommendations provide the maximum benefits from PNF stretching.

Article by Brad Walker and Injury Fix™

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