

PROPRIOCEPTIVE NEUROMUSCULAR FACILITATION (PNF)

Contract Relax PNF stretching is where you contract the muscle and resist against a partner, theraband or towel. This is followed by relaxing into the stretch. Muscle relaxation is increased after contraction therefore it is one of the most effective ways to gain flexibility. It should only be undertaken in a cool down. When working with a partner be safe and mindful. You must never forcefully push your friend's legs to touch the floor in partner stretching.

“Flexible joints must be protected by adequate and balanced muscle strength”.



image Michelle Briggs assisting Emma Terry with stretch

To aid your partner in PNF stretching of the hamstrings hold their calf (not their Achilles tendon) of the extended leg and take it to a point of tension. Hold the stretch for 10 seconds. Your partner will then concentrically contract their hamstrings by pushing their extended leg against your hand. Apply enough force so that there is resistance. This is the 'contract' phase. Complete a second passive stretch held for 30 seconds. This is the 'relax' phase. It does not mean stop and have a rest, rather to relax into the stretch. Your partner's extended leg should move further than before meaning greater hip flexion.

Along with ballistic stretching, overstretching can lead to microscopic muscle tears. Extreme stretching past your range of motion such as oversplits and chin stands can lead to serious injuries. Feeling tight is not always a good reason to stretch either. Give your muscles up to two days to repair the tears. This quote is a great analogy: “If you pull a rope tight, you feel the tension. To make it less tight, do you pull on it harder? No. You put some slack in it.”

Talk to your dance teachers about tailoring a stretching regime to suit your body's strengths and limitations. If you are stretching to gain flexibility, remember there is always a limit to how much you can gain due to the shape of your bones. Don't compare yourself to other dancers. Consistency in your stretching program, for example 4-5 times a week, is the key to maintaining increases. You must also integrate rest and recovery time as well as a variety of stretches and targeted muscle groups. Don't always do your favourite stretches or your favourite side. The ones you're good at might feel nice to do but to be a balanced dancer and to avoid injury you want to be all rounded and able to do choreography on any side the choreographer chooses. Stretching must also be balanced with strengthening for safe dance practice. “Flexible joints must be protected by adequate and balanced muscle strength”.

Brianna Thomas has a Diploma of Dance Performance and a Bachelor of Teaching and Arts. She has been teaching Preliminary and HSC Dance for the past 8 years. All three of her own HSC works were selected for Callback and her students have since been selected as well. Brianna taught at Marie Walton Mahon Dance Academy and the National College of Dance for 8 years and now works at St Columba Anglican School.