

## Stretching essentials

Use these tips to keep stretching safe:

- **Don't consider stretching a warm-up.** You may hurt yourself if you stretch cold muscles. So before stretching, warm up with light walking, jogging or biking at low intensity for five to 10 minutes.
- **Focus on major muscle groups.** When you're stretching, focus on major muscle groups such as your calves, thighs, hips, lower back, neck and shoulders.
- **Don't bounce.** Stretch in a smooth movement, without bouncing. Bouncing as you stretch can cause injury to your muscle.
- **Hold your stretch.** Hold each stretch for about 30 seconds; in problem areas, you may need to hold for around 60 seconds. Breathe normally as you stretch.
- **Don't aim for pain.** Expect to feel tension while you're stretching, not pain. If it hurts, you've pushed too far. Back off to the point where you don't feel any pain, then hold the stretch.
- **Keep up with your stretching.** Stretching can be time-consuming. But you can achieve the most benefits by stretching regularly, at least two to three times a week.
- **Bring movement into your stretching.** Gentle movement can help you be more flexible in specific movements. The gentle movements of tai chi or yoga, for instance, may be a good way to stretch.