

fingertips for the client

BY KARRIE OSBORN



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EASE INTO MOVEMENT

From our first venture into the school gymnasium as kids, we've been taught to stretch. As adults, stretching is as common a morning routine as brushing our teeth or combing our hair.

Mind-body fitness expert Anat Baniel wants us to know how to move and stretch carefully and start our day out right. Baniel, author of *Move Into Life: The Nine Essentials for Lifelong Vitality* (Harmony Books, 2009), believes excessive stretching is an activity that is contrary to the health and longevity of our muscles.

"Muscles are meant to contract and relax," she says. "Stretching them puts stress on them and rips muscle fibers, forcing them to constantly repair themselves after each time you stretch. Your body's movement shouldn't cause repeated damage. It should be more harmonious and flow naturally."

Baniel says her method of stretching actually increases flexibility and motion without damaging muscles. Follow these simple steps:

1. Stand up, spread your feet comfortably, gently bend down, and let your hands move toward your feet. Notice how far you go, without forcing, and come back to standing.
2. Stand, spread your legs comfortably, bend your knees a little, and put your right hand just above your right knee, on your thigh. Put your left hand just above your left knee. Then lean on your legs with the weight of your upper body resting on your hands. Begin to round your back and at the same time pull your belly in; look down at your belly. Then gently arch your

back, push your belly out, lift your head, and look up. Repeat process.

3. Come back to standing, bend forward, and take your hands down toward your feet, as in Step 1. Is there some change already?
4. Now stand with feet apart, and knees bent a little; this time lean with both hands on your left leg, just above the knee as before. Gently and slowly round your back and look down, then arch your back, free the belly muscles (push them out), and look up. Go back and forth four or five times. Then stand and rest for a moment. Feel how you stand.
5. Repeat Step 4, this time leaning with both hands on your right knee.
6. Stand up with your feet spread comfortably and bend down. Can you bend more easily and further than before? Are your toes closer to your hands? "They should be," Baniel says, "because the variations provided by this exercise supplied your brain the information it needed to figure out how to let go of tight muscles and tendons."

Baniel's approach to vital, creative, and energetic life is based not only on the all-important regimens of diet, exercise, and stress management, but upon providing the brain with what it requires for us to grow, evolve, and thrive as individuals. **m&b**

6 *Karrie Osborn is contributing editor for Massage & Bodywork magazine. Contact her at karrie@abmp.com.*



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Anat Baniel
mind-body fitness expert