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# Health & Fitness

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## *The hamstring stretch: A tip from the chiropractor*

By DR. PAT SMITH

BERKELEY HEIGHTS – Remember Middle School gym class? Each one started with some type of warm-up exercises that included stretching.

Many of us did not take those exercises seriously, but we should have. Recent studies by the National Council of Fitness and the American Chiropractic Association Sports Council confirm what I have observed in my practice the past 14 years, our leg muscles, especially the back of the thighs or hamstring muscles, are tighter than ever.

A major cause of tight hamstrings is a lifestyle which involves ever increasing amounts of sitting – sitting while driving, sitting at work, sitting at the computer, sitting play-

ing video games or watching television, etc. When we sit for extended periods of time with our knees bent, the hamstring muscles shorten.

OK, so what is the big deal about tight hamstrings? The big deal is this: short hamstrings alter normal physical function, our walking stride for example, becomes more difficult placing added stress upon our knees, hips and lower backs. Tight hamstrings make it more difficult to bend and move properly, which reduces normal physical performance and increases our chances of developing a variety of musculoskeletal conditions like knee pain, hip pain, and lower back pain, not to mention a host of sports-related injuries and reduced athletic performance.

So no matter what level of phys-

ical activity you enjoy, stretching your hamstrings periodically will help you stay active and feel better. How do you stretch your hamstrings properly?

Lie flat on your back and draw the right knee toward the chest in order to place a cord of some type around the arch of your foot. Holding each end of the cord in your hands, straighten your right leg and lower to floor.

While keeping the right leg straight, slowly pull the cord to lift the right leg off the ground, keeping the right leg relaxed, this will stretch the muscles behind your thigh. The left leg should be held straight against the floor.

Hold and stretch for 10 seconds. Repeat stretch five to 10 times for each leg. Do not over stretch, just pull to a comfortable level.

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