



Are children
naturally
flexible? ▶

◀ **N**ot every child can bend and stretch like a rubber band. Some children, like some adults, are just not flexible. But if they train, children will gain flexibility faster than adults.

The muscle tissue in children is as flexible as muscle tissue in adults. What is quite different is the connective tissue. Children can extend their ligaments and tendons farther than adults can, says Dr. Keith Russell, associate professor of physical education at the University of Saskatchewan. “What boggles my mind is how stiff some young athletes are. Coaches aren’t spending enough time stretching these kids. It’s the best time of their life to do it. You can get such good results with such little effort.”

It is particularly important for children to work on flexibility as they head toward their growth spurt. During rapid growth, flexibility decreases. If a child is not naturally flexible, the best time to gain range is *before* the growth spurt. Increased flexibility may prevent injuries, and also improves an athlete’s performance.

To improve flexibility, children should always perform a proper warm-up followed by stretching exercises. They should also stretch during their cool-down. Effective stretching can improve performance, but overstretching can be harmful to the body by reducing the stability of joints.

