Why I’m Not a Big Fan of Static Stretching (And What You Should Do Instead)

When it comes to flexibility and injury prevention, static stretching often doesn’t provide the benefits many people think it does. While it can increase flexibility, it's not the best choice for tendon health, injury prevention, or performance. I’m a big advocate for dynamic stretching and mobility work. Here’s why.

What’s the Problem with Static Stretching?

Static stretching involves holding a stretch for an extended period. While it can improve range of motion, it doesn’t do much for strengthening tendons or improving tendon health. Here’s why static stretching might not be ideal, especially before exercise:

1. Reduces Power and Strength

Holding static stretches can temporarily reduce tendon stiffness and muscle tension, which decreases power production. This can affect your ability to perform explosive movements like sprinting or jumping, increasing injury risk, especially in high-impact activities.

2. Doesn’t Improve Tendon Health

Tendons need mechanical loading (such as resistance training or plyometrics) to strengthen and adapt. Static stretching lacks this load and doesn’t improve tendon resilience the way strength training or isometrics do.

Why I Prefer Dynamic Stretching and Mobility Work

Dynamic stretching, a movement-based stretching form, is a type of mobility work that prepares your body for movement while also improving flexibility. Here’s why I think it’s superior:

1. Prepares Your Body for Movement

Dynamic stretching activates muscles, increases blood flow, and prepares your tendons and joints for the specific demands of a workout. Examples include leg swings, lunges with a twist, and hip circles, which improve mobility while engaging muscles for stability.

2. Better for Tendon Health

Dynamic stretching helps improve tendon stiffness, which is vital for power and strength. It also activates muscles surrounding the tendons, providing stability and reducing injury risk.

3. Increases Range of Motion Safely

Dynamic stretches improve flexibility without sacrificing strength or stability, as can sometimes happen with static stretching. Controlled movement throughout a range of motion helps you safely increase mobility without overstretching.

4. Enhances Athletic Performance

Dynamic stretching improves **functional flexibility**, which benefits athletic performance. By strengthening muscles through a full range of motion, dynamic stretching also improves coordination, balance, and overall strength.

What Should You Do Instead of Static Stretching?

Here’s a better approach to improve tendon health, flexibility, and injury prevention:

1. Dynamic Stretching Pre-Workout

Before exercising, focus on dynamic stretching. Examples include:

- **Leg swings** (front-to-back, side-to-side)
- **Lunges with a twist**
- **Hip circles**

These movements warm up muscles and joints while improving flexibility and mobility.

2. Mobility Work

Incorporate mobility exercises to target key areas like the hips, ankles, and shoulders. Try:

- **Hip openers**
- **Ankle mobility drills**
- **Spine rotation exercises**

These exercises enhance joint function and stability, which are crucial for overall movement.

3. Isometric Exercises

Isometric exercises, like wall sits or calf raise holds, build tendon strength and resilience by holding positions for extended periods, placing a controlled load on tendons to help them adapt and strengthen.

Key Takeaways:

- **Static stretching** can reduce power and strength temporarily, especially before exercise.
- **Dynamic stretching** is better for preparing your body and improving tendon health.
- **Mobility work** enhances joint function, while **isometrics** strengthen tendons.
- A combination of **dynamic stretching, mobility exercises, and strength training** is the best approach to improving flexibility, preventing injury, and promoting tendon health.

Instead of relying on static stretching, make dynamic stretching and mobility work a regular part of your routine. Your tendons, muscles, and joints will thank you for it!