



## A matter of trust

**Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Society of Physiotherapy!**

If there's one thing you know as a person who does sports or gym of one kind or another, it's that you must stretch before you get going.

After all, that's what you see gymnasts doing. Runners are always on their bottoms grabbing for their toes, and yoga teachers stretch all the time, right?

Right... but they may be wrong.

In recent years, the consensus around stretching has shifted back and forth like a tornado trying to find Dorothy's house in Kansas.

An article in *The Conversation* from a few years back, written by Rob Herbert, senior principal research fellow, Neuroscience Research Australia, sums it up nicely. He says the amateur should stretch if they feel like stretching, but the professional should be more careful: "...it makes more sense to stretch if you're a hurdler than if you're a weightlifter," because stretching has an impact on your flexibility but actually (temporarily) reduces strength in those muscles.

He goes on to say: "These conclusions come with some caveats. First, most of the research into the effects of stretching has investigated the effects of "static" stretching – stretches that are applied and sustained for a short while. There are many other ways of stretching, but most have been the subject of relatively little research, or only poor-quality research.

"Another caveat is that, while quite a lot is known about the acute effects of stretching, much less is known about its chronic effects. No one has attempted to conduct a randomised trial of the effects of regular stretching over periods of years.

"It may be that, in the long term, regular stretching has important effects. Then again, it may be that the long-term effects of stretching are harmful, or that there's no long-term effect at all: we just don't know."

The last decade has seen serious questions being asked of health science across the world. “It is crucial that you should be able to trust in the advice of your healthcare practitioner,” says Professor Witness Mudzi, President of the South African Society of Physiotherapy (SASP). “That’s why the SASP is concerned that our members utilise evidence-based treatments and treatment modalities.”

Just this year, the Cochrane Reviews (the gold standard for reviews of research) came out with a review of a treatment that used to be in fairly common use for people in chronic pain, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), which uses electrical currents to stimulate nerves.

“We are unable to confidently state whether TENS is effective in relieving pain in people with chronic pain,” the reviewers wrote. “This is due to the very low quality of the evidence, and the overall small numbers of participants included in studies in the reviews.”

This information was quickly circulated to members of the SASP. “We want our members to know as much as possible about the research in their field, so that they can make the best and most effective treatment choices for their patients,” says Mudzi. “So the jury’s still out on TENS and on stretching? Physiotherapists might still use these treatments if they have had results with them, but we want them to do so from a position of knowledge.”

If you’re confused about stretching, you’re not alone. Fortunately, SASP members, especially those who have done additional courses in sports-related therapy are not. They can give you valuable guidance about the right kind of stretching to do. And they’ll be up to date on the latest developments in research!

To find a physio close to you, visit [www.saphysio.co.za](http://www.saphysio.co.za)

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