

## *Stretch of the Week*

### **Sample Stretch: The Spinal Wave**

Flexibility training is an important part of a well balanced fitness program. Along with resistance and cardiovascular training, regular stretching is important to:

1. Prevent injury
2. Combat stress
3. Relieve pain and muscle soreness
4. Sleep better
5. Reach an ever-higher fitness level

***Fitness training:*** Let's face it: it's necessarily repetitive. We cannot avoid this—in order to perform an activity well, we must teach our body to do it by repeating it. Plus, we must remain physically active in order to remain physically healthy.

***The down side?*** When muscles work relentlessly as you pursue your favorite fitness activity, they shorten. Learn to pull them regularly back into length by stretching, so they can continue to assist you with optimum range and ease in physical activity. Stretching also prevents stiff, short muscles from pulling bones out of line, which negatively affects your posture and can produce pain or injury.

#### **Why is a fluid spine important to health?**

The condition of your spine determines your “age.” If you observe biologically “old” people, the stiffness of their spine is a major reason why we perceive them as “old.” You notice their inability to bend and turn easily. Staying young is largely a function of a youthful spine.

***Set Yourself Up.*** Do this wave on the floor from a seated position. Begin by stretching your legs straight out in front of you. Flex your feet; bend your knees slightly; and rotate your toes out. If you were to stand up now, you would be in the famous “Charlie Chaplin” position—or, for those of you familiar with ballet, in the first position. The space between your legs is now shaped like an elongated diamond.



***Do the Movement.*** Create a C-curve in your back by allowing your head to drop slightly and your waist to move backwards. The farthest backward point of the C-curve is your waistline (belly button). Begin by ducking the top of your head downward. Create a smooth, moving upward roll. Your chin follows your head—then your neck, shoulders, chest—and then your whole spine. At the end of the movement your spine will be as arched as you can make it. Feel your pelvis rising up and forward between your legs at the end of the move. Repeat half a dozen times, or until you feel your spine loosening up.

***Deepen the Movement—Tip.*** Pull on your legs with your hands to help your spine create this seamless wave.

***Enlist Your Mind:*** Imagine your spine is just as flexible as the King of Spinal Movement—the snake. Think about it: the snake's body is ALL spine. That's how it moves. Imagine every vertebra able to slither the way a snake does it.