



# Recovering Your Body

Sometimes you need to stretch yourself.

by Thom Forbes

**Sure, the more flexible you feel, the more you'll enjoy your game** of tennis or a spirited walk. But flexibility is also critical for everyday functions, whether it's folding the laundry or playing with your grandkids. And far more important for your stretching sessions than being able to touch your toes—or even your knees, for that matter—is adopting the right attitude: one of compassion toward yourself and your body.

“The concept of acceptance is absolutely crucial for learning how to work with your body,” says Cris Caivano, a movement therapist and educator who writes the *Creak No More* blog for RenewEveryDay.com and is the author of *Strength Training Over 50: Stay Fit and Fabulous*. “You have to accept where you are, whether it's ‘My calves are in knots’ or ‘I can't relax my jaw muscles.’

“You also have to be in a fluid conversation with your body, and that means listening, not just going ‘Well, here's how I think about that,’” Caivano says.

Unfortunately, she says, it sometimes takes a bottoming-out experience for people to start paying attention to what their bodies are telling them. But it's never too late to start paying heed, even if

those trapezius muscles in your upper back seem tighter than the loan officer the week you got out of detox.

With her career as a modern dancer winding down in the late 1980s, Caivano was teaching jazz dance to adults at Purchase College, SUNY while pursuing her master's degree in dance education at Teachers College of Columbia University. That's when someone bearing grant money asked her to develop a dance therapy program for alcoholics and addicts in early recovery.

She hit the stacks and attended open Alcoholics Anonymous meetings to learn everything she could about the disease. Then she blended her research with what she'd learned from working with beginning adult dancers for so long. She found that the work that was necessary on the physical side was similar to what was happening within her students on the spiritual side.

Newbie's bodies limit what they can do. In order to dance expressively, they need to go back to basics and relearn how to stand up straight and balance themselves. And that means stretching out muscles and joints that have gotten tight and creaky. The goal is to get your body into a neutral position so that your bones are holding you up, not the fibers that connect them.

One fundamental difference between resistance training, where the goal is to build strength, and flexibility exercises, where the goal is to increase your range of motion, is that with the former you push yourself to the edge of discomfort and then try to go a

little bit further. When you stretch, you want to push to the edge of discomfort and breathe, relax and focus—generally for about 30 seconds—until the discomfort recedes.

After obtaining her master's degree, Caivano developed innovative dance therapy programs at two private rehabilitation facilities.

"In my mind, it was an absolute perfect fit to use dance for the alcoholic and drug addict in rehab because it was not only good for them physically—helping them get their health back—but also good for them socially," she says. "And it was also good for stress control."

Realizing how important it was for people who had become isolated or frightened about expressing their feelings to interact with others, Caivano invented movement games to get her clients laughing and to break through their subconscious resistance in the process.

"Because it was nonverbal, they were able to discover things about themselves that they wouldn't have if they had to sit down and write it as part of their step work," she says. "There were things they may not have been aware of or comfortable talking about."

Then there's the wow factor that comes from people discovering the joy of exercising a functional body with a clear mind. "A lot of people said, 'Oh, my God, I didn't know I could have this much fun without being drunk.'" ■

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*For more of Thom Forbes and Recovering Your Body, visit the blog at [RenewEveryDay.com](http://RenewEveryDay.com).*

## SPIRAL STRETCH

Cris Caivano is currently offering the "10 Top Tension Relieving Stretches" on her *Creak No More* blog at [RenewEveryDay.com/blogs/CreakNoMore.aspx](http://RenewEveryDay.com/blogs/CreakNoMore.aspx). Here's one to get you started.

Just about everyone with whom Caivano works with feels tightness in the upper chest and weakness in the upper back—a condition that's aggravated by our sitting hunched in front of a various screens for long periods. For this, she recommends the Spiral Stretch.



Lie on your back with both knees bent and pressed gently together and your feet flat on the floor. Rest your arms on the floor straight out to the sides like the letter T.



Slowly lower your knees to the right and turn your head to the left at the same time. Relax into the stretch for at least six to 10 deep, slow breaths, and then bring your knees back to the center and slowly lower them to the other side, changing the position of your head, too. Repeat this stretch as many times as you'd like.