



Soft Exercise: The Complete Book of Stretching

Author: Arthur Balaskas and John Stirk
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Are you one of those people that wants to feel better physically, but doesn't like the notion of having to run a marathon every day to achieve it? Well, a little can go a long way...

This book reminds of Yoga, which is a pretty cool thing. Many of the moves, and indeed principles, contained within this book have a Yogaish – if that's actually a word – feel. Yet despite this, *Soft Exercise* is one of those books that manages to divulge a lot without confusing the reader. It explains the philosophy behind the science of stretching; 'after all' the authors argue, 'a balanced body leads to a happy whole'.

At around 150 pages, divided into 12 chapters of varying length, the book opens by selling the many advantages of regular stretching in everyday life. The introductory section lists the benefits of stretching for the various systems of the body, nervous, respiratory and so on, before things move on to offer an insight into the nitty gritty of stretching and strains, and how we wear our bodies out in everyday life without realising. The main body of the text then sees the authors move onto the collection of stretches themselves, a comprehensive list covering the whole body. Throughout, the style of writing is flowing and informative (but by no means overwhelming), and it's supported by a great many illustrations covering the human anatomy/physiology, along with diagrams demonstrating how to safely carry out each and every exercise. Towards the end of the book, Candy Amsden's comprehensive illustrations are used to an even greater level, offering the reader a list of bespoke stretches for sports people. Each list – and there are a good few – is specific to a particular sporting activity.

Ultimately, then, I think this book does have a great deal to offer. It discusses in detail the natural order of the body, how everyday life disrupts that order, and how just a few simple stretching exercises can normally put things right. Moreover, and in keeping with its philosophical approach, the text plods on at a nice comfortable pace, and can easily be read in one very pleasant sitting. An all-round good read.

9 sausages out of 10

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