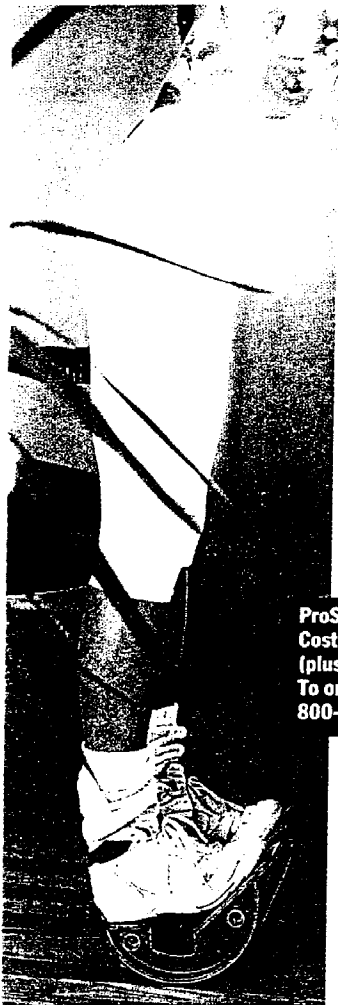


Which are worth adding
to your workout?

rating the muscle stretchers



By Clifton Leaf

By now it's been drilled into even the densest head: It's necessary to stretch both before and after workout. Stretching not only increases flexibility, allowing muscles and joints to go through their full range of movement, but eases muscle strain, helps prevent injury to vulnerable tendons and ligaments and literally warms up muscle groups with added blood flow. To some, of course, stretching is an end in itself. Practitioners of yoga and t'ai chi have managed, through the aeons, to extend body and consciousness to the limit—without any of the fancy-sounding stretching aids you hear so much about today. Thus the question arises: If a yogi doesn't need any help limbering up, do you?

ProStretch (3 pounds)
Cost: \$59.95
(plus shipping)
To order: Tech Sport,
800-535-3629

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We invited a panel of fitness experts to sample a trio of stretching tools and tell us which, if any, really extend an exerciser's workout. Here's how the devices stacked up.

ProStretch PT Our experts agree: This product's the best of the lot. The ProStretch PT-200 is a terrific tool for increasing flexibility in the lower leg—where muscle strain from running, racquet sports and aerobics is most likely to occur. Its twin arch-shaped wedges, made of a durable plastic, are perfect for stretching opposing muscles in the calf, Achilles tendons and often-sore plantar fascia muscles, which run the length of the foot. At the rear of each wedge, a cup anchors your heels, allowing you to lean forward or backward in a safe, static extension. All moves are clearly explained in ProStretch's accompanying brochure. The unit also includes that rare commodity in the fitness world—a no-

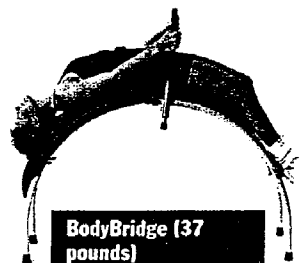
IsoMaxx (2 pounds)
Cost: \$39.95 (plus shipping)
To order: Macho Products, 800-327-6812



nonsense video that clearly demonstrates each exercise long enough for you to copy it. The only other equipment needed is a wall to lean against. In short, as one tester put it: "This device does what it's supposed to do."

IsoMaxx At first sight the IsoMaxx belt looks as if it will be helpful and easy to use. But it ends up, our experts say, being more lumbering than limbering. In fact, using a towel for the same exercises is more productive. For starters, you can only adjust the tension of the belt when you're not in a stretched position. "If you want to go further," one tester said, "you have to get out of the contraction and readjust the straps." IsoFlex's limited spectrum of exercises seems confined to muscles in the inner thigh. The remaining stretches suggested in the booklet, say our pros, are virtually useless with this device. Leg spreads, even without such tension belts, are difficult for most people. Adds one tester: "This program starts with something difficult and makes it harder."

BodyBridge Imagine a product that looks straightforward but feels as exotic as an immersion tank and you've got the BodyBridge. A sort of collapsible massage table shaped in a 180-degree arch, the BodyBridge mixes principles from the realms of yoga and chiropractics. You lie faceup or down on the arched table and let the weight of dangling head and feet "decompress" the spine. Gravity stretches back muscles and vertebrae in much the same way it squashes them together when you sit or stand for long periods. And for



BodyBridge (37 pounds)
Cost: \$362
(including shipping)
To order: Arch-Eez Institute for Back Health, 800-326-2724. Minimal assembly required.