

## - Musculoskeletal system

# Does your body feel tight when you wake up?

Here's why your muscles are stiff in the morning and what you can do to feel better

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If you regularly wake up with stiff muscles, creaky joints or the general feeling that your body simply isn't as limber as it was when you went to bed, the first thing to know is that you are not alone. Waking up with a tight body is "almost a universal human experience", said Maryclaire Capetta, a physical therapist and assistant professor in the department of kinesiology at the University of Connecticut. And, she added, it's quite common for it to happen every day.

But while feeling stiff in the morning is normal and typically dissipates quickly, it's also uncomfortable while it lasts. The good news, experts say, is that there are a few tricks you can use — when you feel stiff, and even before the feeling arises — to help you get relief, faster.

### Why you feel stiff

Most of the time, that tight feeling when you wake up is a result of overnight changes to the lubrication in two different features of the body: The joints and the fascia.

The fascia is a complex group of connective tissues that surround and support the muscles, soft tissues, organs and bones. It forms multiple layers, with a gel-like lubricant in between that allows the layers to slide and glide smoothly, and which helps you to feel loose and limber, said Dr Antonio Stecco, a fascia researcher and professor of rehabilitation medicine at New York University, US. In certain situations — like when your body temperature drops, when you've been still for an extended time, or when lactic acid builds up in the muscles and fascia during intense exercise — the lubricant becomes thicker and more viscous and the layers of fascia can't glide as easily, leading to feelings of stiffness. When you sleep, many of those thickening situations occur: You're usually still for a long time (say, eight hours) and your body temperature tends to drop.

Your joints may also contribute to feeling stiff in the morning. In healthy joints, a thick fluid lubricates the space between the ends of your bones, which are capped with cartilage, to help them move freely and comfortably. Whenever you're still for a long period of time, the cartilage sucks up the lubricant like a sponge, Capetta said, making your joints feel creaky.

### How to feel better

The good news is that the remedy for stiffness in the morning — whether it's caused by your fascia or your joints — is the same: Movement.

While you're still in bed and lying on your back, start by doing a full-body stretch by extending your legs and arms wide and in opposite directions. Then, try pointing and flexing your toes, or stretching just your arms and torso, mimicking the cliché “just woke up” stretch.

To bring fluid back into your joints, try gently bending and unbending your knees and elbows, rolling your wrists and ankles or gently nodding your head from side to side.

If you still feel stiff once you've gotten out of bed, try marching in place, continuing to bend and re-bend any joints that feel stiff, Capetta said.

If your back and the sides of your body feel tight, you could try a gentle stretch, like a loose forward hang toward your toes with slightly bent knees, or side bends and cat-cow yoga poses.

If you don't already stretch regularly, adding even 15 minutes of stretching to your day may help you feel less stiff upon waking, Stecco said. If you sit in front of a computer for work, try moving around and

day. changing positions throughout the

If your joint stiffness lasts for longer than an hour after you've gotten out of bed and persists for weeks or even months, you should consult a doctor