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Flexibility Training

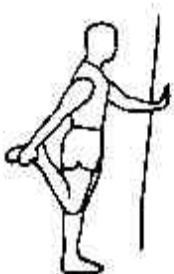
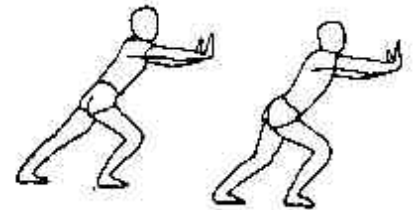
A good preventative for injuries remains adequate conditioning. This should include aerobic training and strength training that ensures a balance in strength and endurance. The flexibility of the muscles is also a major factor in preventing hamstring injuries. Having proper muscle flexibility will make the athlete perform at a higher competitive level. Proper stretching before and after exercise will: decrease injuries, enhance performance, improve joint range of motion, and decrease post-exercise soreness.

Flexibility improvement and maintenance is often overlooked when an exercise program is instituted. Muscle flexibility is important to everyone due to its relationship to health and the body's working capacity. Poor flexibility of joints and muscles can cause injuries, or make daily living painful. The best examples of this are seen in the shoulder and lower back.

Proper stretching should include both upper and lower extremities and the back for any competitive activity or training. Remember do not bounce when stretching, this can, in some cases, result in injury. Stretching should be performed following a gentle warm-up, such as 5 - 10 minutes of cycling or walking. Muscles will respond better to flexibility training when warm and pliable. The "core" stretches for all people should include: hamstrings, quadriceps, calves, gluteals, and shoulders. Volleyball and basketball players should add more specific shoulder stretches, while sprinters should add more specific lower extremity stretches. Hold each stretch for 10 - 30 seconds, repeat the stretch 3 to 5 times for each body part, and stretch 3 - 5 times daily.

Basic Stretches for Active Individuals

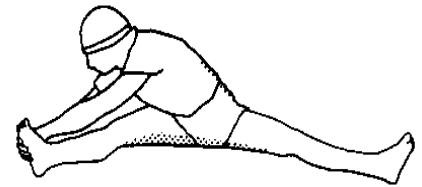
Calf Stretch: Stand facing a wall, with one foot in front of the other. Lean forward with your hands on the wall. Bend front leg, leaving the rear leg straight and keeping both heels on the floor. Continue until a gentle stretch is felt in the calf. Hold 10 seconds, then repeat with other leg forward. A second stretch is performed in the same manner, but with a slight bend in the knee of the back leg. This stretch will be felt lower in the calf, near the Achilles Tendon. Repeat each stretch 3 times, with a 10 sec hold.



Quadriceps Stretch: Stand with the knee bent, foot held in hand, gently pull foot towards buttocks. The stretch is felt in the front of the thigh. Do not bend over at the waist, this will make the stretch less effective. Hold 10 seconds and repeat 3 times for each leg.

Groin (Butterfly) Stretch: Sit on floor, bend knees so that soles of feet are touching. Gently draw feet towards the groin. Relax, and let the weight of the legs allow knees to move towards the floor. If a stronger stretch is desired, use the elbows to gently push the knees to the floor. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat 3 times.

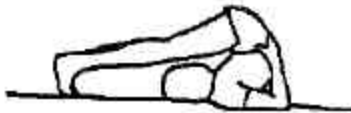




Hamstring Stretch: Sit on floor, with legs straight out in front, toes pointing up. Gently lean forward, causing a stretch in backs of legs. Do not allow the back to “hump” as you reach for your toes. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat 3 times.

(For variation, try this with the legs spread apart. Stretch to the left leg, middle, and right leg. Hold 10 seconds each, and repeat 3 times.)

Trunk Twister: Sit on floor. Cross leg over thigh at the knee and place opposite elbow on outside of bent knee. Gently stretch back and buttock muscles by pushing bent knee across body while looking in the opposite direction. Reverse arm and leg position for opposite side. Hold for 10 seconds, and repeat 3 times.



Advanced Back Stretch: Lay on back, bend knees and lift legs over head. Straighten knees, causing a gentle stretch in backs of legs, buttock, and back muscles. Hold for 10 seconds, relax, and repeat 3 times.

Horizontal adduction stretch (left): Grasp elbow of arm to be stretched with opposite hand. Gently pull arm across front of chest, just below the throat. Hold for 10 seconds, relax and repeat 3 times for each arm.



Tricep Stretch (right): Lift arm to be stretched so that elbow is next to ear, allow elbow to bend. Grasp bent elbow with opposite hand and gently pull arm behind head. Hold for 10 seconds, relax, and repeat 3 times for each arm.

Biceps/Chest Stretch: Stand grasping door frame with both arms at shoulder level. Slowly lean away from door, gently stretching chest and shoulder muscles. Hold for 10 seconds, relax, and repeat 3 times.



Wrist Flexion (left): With elbow straight and palm facing down, grasp back of hand, and gently pull hand back, stretching forearm. Hold for 10 seconds, and repeat 3 times.



Wrist Extension (right): With elbow straight and palm facing up, grasp palm of hand, and gently pull hand back, stretching forearm. Hold for 10 seconds, and repeat 3 times.



Additional stretches can be found on the next two pages.

