
Limbering up – Stretches

By Cheng Bijun, Physiotherapist, Alexandra Hospital

Why is stretching important?

Stretching helps enhance flexibility. Other benefits may include:

- Decreased muscle soreness.
- Decreased muscle resistance.
- Relaxing of muscles.
- Reduction of stress and tension.
- Improved circulation.
- Enhanced athletic performance.



How should I stretch? What are the different types of stretches?

Different stretches help improve different types of flexibility. They include:

Static stretch: It helps increase static flexibility, which is important for preventing injury. For static stretching, assume the stretch position gently and slowly, until you feel tension in the muscle. Hold the stretch for at least 15 to 20 seconds and repeat five to 10 times. Increase the stretch slowly: It is important that the stretch is pain-free. Such stretches are appropriate for post-runs.

Dynamic stretch: This improves dynamic flexibility, which is essential for athletic performance. Dynamic stretching involves moving the targeted body parts while increase the reach and/or speed of movement gradually. The movement should be gentle, controlled and within the range of motion. Do not jerk or bounce, and repeat in sets of eight to 12. It should also be pain-free. Such stretches are appropriate before your run as part of your warm-up routine



Ballistic stretch: This may be used by athletes in the later stages of training, and with proper guidance. It involves stretching a muscle over its normal limits with a bouncing movement. Injury may occur if it is not done properly. Hence, it is not commonly used.

When should stretching be done?

Stretching is generally done after a warm-up, such as slow jogging or swimming, until you sweat mildly. It should be done before and after your exercise. Remember to stretch gently and slowly to the point of tension, not to the point of pain. Do not overstretch the muscles as this may lead to injuries such as microscopic muscle tears.