



Stretching

At Shelter we want all of our runners to get most from the sport and get to the start line in April in the best possible shape. One often forgotten component of your training plan is stretching and here we outline some of the important issues.

There seems to be an endless debate in the running world of whether stretching before and after a run is necessary or not. One camp suggests stretching avoids injury and protects the body from the harshness of the road, while the other camp believes stretching offers little benefits and in fact, can actually cause injury.

So who's right? Well both camps are right to a point. Stretching, when done properly, can decrease the chances of an injury but if not performed properly, can actually increase your chances of an injury.

Stretching is one of the most important aspects of any training programme. It can protect the body from the severity of the road by reducing muscle soreness, risk of injury to muscles, joints and tendons and it can improve your athletic performance. Care should be taken when stretching – if you stretch too quickly the muscle can contract and increase tension, therefore, muscles should always be stretched slowly and the stretch should be held for approximately 30 seconds, this way the muscle tension falls and the muscle can be stretched further.

When stretching don't 'bounce' the muscle! It's a common mistake but doing it can pull or tear the muscle you're trying to ease. Don't stretch if you feel tightness in the muscle or if you feel any pain or discomfort.

Stretching should form part of your training session, both before and after, your run. Whilst you may not get the same kind of enjoyment from it as running, the benefits from stretching correctly can only improve your performance.

London Marathon 2003

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Check out our top ten stretches:

- 1. Calf Stretch** Position your body about three feet from a wall and stand with your feet at shoulder width. Place your hands on the wall with your arms straight for support. Lean your hips forward and bend your knees slightly to stretch your calves.
- 2. Leg Stretch** From the previous position, bend forward to lower your body to waist height. Bring one foot forward with your knee slightly bent. Lift the toes of the front foot to stretch the muscle under the calf. Stretch both legs.
- 3. Back Stretch** Grip your elbow with the opposite hand and gently push the elbow up and across your body until your hand reaches between your shoulder blades. Gently push on your elbow to guide your hand down your back as far as it will comfortably go, stretching your triceps and shoulders. Stretch both arms.
- 4. Hamstring Stretch** Lie down with one leg straight up in the air, the other bent with foot flat on the ground. Hook a towel over the arch of the lifted foot, and gently pull on the towel as you push against it with your foot. Push gently only to the point where you feel your muscles contract. Stretch both legs.
- 5. Quadriceps Stretch** **Kneel** on your knees (without resting back on your heels). Lean back with your body erect and your arms to the side. Hold for 10 seconds.
- 6. Heel To Buttock** Stand on one foot, with one hand on a wall for balance. Hold the other foot with the opposite hand and raise the heel of the lifted foot to the buttocks (or as near as possible), stretching your quadriceps. Keep your body upright throughout. Repeat with the other leg.
- 7. Hip & Lower Back Stretch** Sit on the ground with your legs crossed. Lift your right leg and cross it over the left, which should remain bent. Hug the right leg to your chest and twist the trunk of your body to look over your right shoulder. Change legs and repeat
- 8. Hamstring & Back Stretch** Lie on your back with your knees bent. Hug your shins to your chest to stretch your hamstrings and lower back.
- 9. Quads and Lower Back Stretch** Lie on your back and, with your feet flat on the ground, lift your hips up until your body forms a flat plane. Repeat this ten times for 30 seconds each to stretch your quads and lower back.
- 10. Groin Stretch** Seated, put the soles of your feet together. With your elbows on the inside of your knees, gradually lean forward and gently press your knees toward the ground.

In August 2002 The British Medical Journal featured a controversial article on stretching that questioned its value. In case you did read it you should treat it with caution as it was not a comprehensive research piece for a wide variety of reasons. In the opinion of the majority of runners stretching is vital as can seriously improve your performance and prevent injuries.

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