



Week 3- Stretching! When, Why and How

Did you know that improper stretching is the second leading cause of running/walking injuries? Studies have shown that morning runners become injured more often than noontime and evening runners, probably due to stretching cold muscles. It is hard to stretch muscles that are not loosened and warmed up and you take the risk of tearing a muscle. Think of your muscle as taffy. Taffy cannot stretch when it is cold, it tears. Taffy *can* stretch when you warm it up, and it stretches a lot! A thorough warm-up before stretching, or postponing stretching until after running/walking, may reduce the risk of injury.

So now the question is, why do I need to stretch? Many experts agree that stretching reduces muscle soreness after running/walking and results in better athletic performance. Gentle stretching after a race or workout can also promote healing and lactic acid removal from the muscles. Stretching is most effective when performed several times each week; a minimum of one stretching session per week is sufficient to maintain flexibility.

You need to be careful about how you stretch. Never bounce while stretching because you can tear or pull the muscle you are trying to stretch. Also avoid stretching too quickly, as the muscle will respond with a strong contraction and increase tension. Stretch slowly, and hold the stretch for a minimum of 20 to 30 seconds. **Remember, only stretch once your muscles are warm either after a thorough warm up or after your run/walk.**

Basic Stretches for Runners

Head Circles: Start with your ear near your shoulder on one side, rotate your head around to the front, ending with your ear near the shoulder on the other side. Roll your head back to the other side. Repeat 5-10 times.



Quadricep Stretch: Stand erect, holding onto a wall for support.

Bend your knee behind you so that you can grasp your foot, holding your heel against your buttocks. Stand up straight and push your knee gently back as far as you can, the hand just keeps the heel in place. (For some, it is more comfortable to use the hand from the opposite side).

Hold for 20-30 seconds, then switch legs.



Hamstring Stretch #1: Lie down with one leg straight up in the air, the other bent with foot flat on the ground. Loop a towel over the arch of the lifted foot, and gently pull on the towel as you push against it with your foot. Push only to the point where your muscles contract. Hold for 20-30 seconds, then switch legs.



Hamstring Stretch #2: Stand erect near a chair or table about 18" high. Place one foot on chair with heel down and toes pointing up. Lean forward with a straight back until you feel a slight stretch in the back of your leg. Hold for 20-30 seconds (keeping the back flat), then switch legs.



Calf Stretch: Stand an arm's-length from a wall/post. Lean into wall/post, bracing yourself with your arms. Place one leg forward with knee bent - this leg will have no weight put on it. Keep other leg back with knee straight and heel down. Keeping back straight, move hips toward wall until you feel a stretch. Hold 30 seconds. Relax. Repeat with other leg.



Achilles Stretch: From the calf stretch position, bend the back knee so that the angle is changed to stretch the Achilles tendon. Keep your heel down, hold 15-30 seconds. Then switch legs.

