

The Power of Dynamic Stretching

The Importance of Stretching

An objective of a warming-up prior to an athletic event or general exercise is to optimize performance. In order to prevent injuries, players should do warm-up and cool-down routines with stretching. Stretching helps you to recover faster after play, reduces soreness and prepares you for the next time you are active.

Dynamic Stretching = Better Performance

The National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) recommends dynamic stretching prior to any physical activity, because it actively prepares the muscles, warms up the body and takes the muscles through their full range of motion. Dynamic stretching combines the art of stretching with movement which helps to prepare the body for activity. Examples of dynamic stretching include walking knee hugs to stretch the hips and glutes, walking leg pulls behind the back to stretch the quads, pump stretches for the calves and low back, the Spiderman stretch for the groin and hips and the inchworm stretch for the hamstrings.

Static Stretching vs. Dynamic Stretching

Research shows that dynamic stretching (stretching with movement) is most effective in warm-ups and that static stretching (stretching without movement) is best post-play. Static stretching consists of stretching isolated muscles or muscle groups to the point of slight discomfort and hold for 15-30 seconds. While dynamic stretching is more active and focuses on joint mobility.

Static stretching before practice or a sport is traditional habit for sport, but may not be beneficial --- or even detrimental --- to performance. The NSCA reports that static stretching before activity can compromise muscle performance. Static stretching prior to activity has been shown to decrease force production, power output, running speed, movement time and muscular endurance --- all integral components of performing well, physically and skillfully, in the game of football. Static stretching after activity is more practical, and will allow the muscles to cool down and relax after engaging in exercise.

Proper Stretching Technique

Begin and end with 5 minutes of walking, light jogging, jumping jacks or side shuffling. The purpose of the warm-up is to raise your body temperature, ready your heart and lungs for exercising, and improve overall muscle function. The goal for the warm up should be to reach the point of beginning to perspire. The purpose of a cool-down is to rid the body of lactic acid and other waste products and to gradually reduce your body's core temperature and heart rate.

After your warm-up, begin your dynamic stretching. Avoid sudden, jerky movements and bouncing while you stretch. If you feel pain, stop immediately and seek medical attention if necessary. Consult your physician before beginning any exercise program.