



Stretching for Sport and Activity

Stretching should be an important part of your training programme

Most people don't stretch enough as the benefits and results are difficult to measure when compared to improvements that can be seen in strength or cardiorespiratory training. However, an adequate stretching programme can provide improvements in flexibility, mobility and strength.

Types of Stretching

Static stretching is probably the most common method of stretching and involves moving into a position and holding it for between 10 and 30 secs. Dynamic stretching involves moving through the range of movement in a controlled and deliberate manner. This type of stretching has been associated with improved performance in sport.

Passive stretching involves using some sort of outside assistance to stretch such as a partner, body weight or gravity. You relax the muscle and rely on this outside assistance to move into position. It's comfortable and controlled but may not have as much relevance to sports people as you don't have to use your own muscle strength to initiate the stretch. Active stretching is achieved by contracting the opposing muscle to the one that you are stretching. For example, rounding the upper back and shoulders forward would provide an active stretch for the upper back. This method is more difficult to achieve but may be more beneficial to those involved in physical activity as it helps to improve strength and posture.

When Should I Stretch?

The best time to stretch is after a workout when the muscles and soft tissues are more pliable and the muscles can be eased back to pre-exercise length or as a training method alone to improve flexibility. It had previously been thought that stretching prior to training would reduce the risk of injury. However, recent research suggests that this is not the case but that stretching prior to training which is aimed at improving speed and power may in fact result in power output being reduced. Therefore, it may be more appropriate for sports players to perform a dynamic stretching routine prior to a match or training session.

What Should I Stretch?

Think about the movements you will be performing in your sport or activity and try to include these in a warm-up routine. By going through movements relevant to your activity the body will be adequately prepared for your match or training session.