

Why You Should NEVER Stretch Before Exercise

By: Mark Young, B.Kin

Scientists have known for some time that stretching can actually reduce the strength of the muscles you've stretched for up to one hour. And since it is these very muscles that provide support for your joints, then stretching is not a good idea if you're about to engage in some form of physical activity. In essence, stretching before exercise is like loosening the lug nuts on your tires before going for a drive.

Instead we, and many other fitness professionals, have chosen to use dynamic stretching as a means of increasing flexibility and preparing the joints for exercise without any muscle weakening effects.

Below is a sample of a beginner level whole body mobility drill to be performed prior to exercise.

Ankle Mobility Drill #1

The purpose of the first drill is to increase mobility at the ankle.



To do this place one foot approximately 12 inches from a wall and place both hands on the wall in front of you. While keeping the weight on the front heel, rock back and forth trying to shoot the front knee as far as possible over the front foot. Repeat for 8-10 repetitions per leg.

To view a video of this exercise click [HERE](#).

Note: Wearing shoes with high heels causes limitations in ankle mobility. If you regularly wear shoes with heels (even as low as one inch) you should do this drill daily.

Front to Back Leg Swings

This purpose of this drill is to increase mobility at the hips, stretch the hamstrings and hip flexors, and activate the glutes.



To set up, stand upright while holding on to an object or the wall beside you with one hand. Swing one leg forwards and backwards while trying to gradually increase the range of motion on each swing. Be sure to keep the leg straight and the body still. All movement should occur at the hip. Repeat for 8-10 repetitions per leg.

To view a video of this exercise click [HERE](#).

Side to Side Leg Swings

The purpose of this exercise is to increase mobility in the hips, stretch the adductors (inner thigh muscles), and activate the gluteus medius.



In a similar fashion to the front to back leg swings you'll want to hold on to something in front of you for balance. From this position swing one leg out to the side and let it come back slightly in front of the planted leg. Gradually increase the range of motion on each swing. Be sure to keep the leg straight and the body still. All movement should occur at the hip. Repeat for 8-10 repetitions per leg.

To view a video of this exercise click [HERE](#).

Cradle Walks

This goal of this drill is to improve hip mobility and stretch the piriformis muscle.



While standing upright, grab onto one foot with both hands. Pull gently on the leg and return it to the starting position. Repeat with the other leg. Make sure to stand tall as you pull on the foot. Repeat for 8-10 repetitions per leg.

To view a video of this exercise click [HERE](#).

Thoracic Extension on Foam Roller

This purpose of this drill is to improve mobility of the upper (thoracic) spine.



To perform this drill sit on the floor with a foam roller positioned perpendicular to your body. Lie back placing the area just above the lower back on the roller and give yourself a big hug (pulling the shoulder blades apart). Lift your hips off the floor and roll towards the top of the back making sure to stop before you reach the neck area. When you reach this point reverse the motion and walk the roller back down towards the starting position. It is important to avoid rolling the lower back while performing this drill. Even if it feels good to roll this area you should avoid it at all costs.

You may find the area just above the lower back (the thoraco-lumbar area) to be particularly tender so you may want to spend some time working on this spot. Perform 2-3 rolls in each direction. If you have long hair you might want to put it up as it tends to get caught under the roller.

As you get more comfortable with this exercise you should try to extend your upper spine around the roller as you move. It is completely normal to hear a few cracks and pops as you do this drill so don't be alarmed if someone runs in asking if you're making popcorn.

To view a video of this exercise click [HERE](#).

NOTE: Sitting in front of the computer all day can leave you with a condition called kyphosis and make you look a lot like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. If you're a bonafide desk jockey it wouldn't hurt to do this exercise daily.

Kneeling Thoracic Rotation

This purpose of this drill is to improve mobility of the upper (thoracic) spine.



While on the hands and knees place the palm of one hand on the back of the head and bring the bent elbow towards the opposite knee. From this position “open up” and try to raise that elbow as much as possible. Make sure to keep the lower spine still and allow as much movement as possible to take place at the upper back. Repeat for 8-10 repetitions per side.

To view a video of this exercise click [HERE](#).

Scapular Wall Slide

The purpose of this drill is to improve shoulder mobility and activate the muscles of the mid back.



Stand with the butt and shoulders against the wall and place the hands flat against the wall in the “stick ‘em up” position. While keeping the hands and elbows in contact with the wall, slide the arms up to the fully extended position. If you can not fully extend the arms without the elbows coming off the wall don’t force it. Just stop when you feel them starting to raise and return to the starting position. Repeat for 8-10 repetitions.

To view a video of this exercise click [HERE](#).

NOTE: Many people will find that they can hardly get their arms into the starting position without discomfort. If you find yourself in this category you should perform this exercise daily until this improves.

Summary

All in all, this mobility circuit should take less than five minutes. Give it a try before you exercise.

If you don’t exercise regularly mobility is still important. You should perform this circuit once weekly per decade of your age. For example, a 50 year old person should do this routine 5 times per week.

Enjoy!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mark Young is an exercise and nutrition consultant and president of Nutrex Solutions Private Personal Training. He has a degree in Kinesiology and a minor in Psychology from McMaster University. He also studied exercise physiology at the graduate level as part of the world renowned Exercise Metabolism Research Group at McMaster. This strong academic background gives Mark the ability to wade through the complex world of scientific journals and translate research into measurable results.

Since launching Nutrex Solutions in 2002 Mark and his team have been changing lives and creating jaw-dropping results for their clients through scientifically designed exercise and nutrition programs.

Mark regularly presents corporate seminars for companies such as Baxter Healthcare, Meridian Credit Union, and Scotiabank. He has also recently received attention from local media and has been featured as an expert on The CH News at Noon and several times in the Hamilton Spectator newspaper.