

Introduction to Stretching for Runners

By MDI Coach Sarah Black



One of the key things you have to do to avoid injury as you run, jog, or any type of exercise is to stretch. Light stretching will loosen your muscles and help you cool down. Stretching after you run or jog will help remove the lactate acid from your muscles. This happens during your run whether it is fifteen minutes or over an hour of running. Stretching can help strengthen your muscles, keep you flexible and help you avoid injury.

There are 3 common types of stretching: static, dynamic and PNF. Static stretching is done after your workout. Each stretch is held for 10-30 seconds. Dynamic stretching is done after your warm up, before your run workout. These are sports specific movements. PNF is done after your work out. This is done with a partner and is most beneficial when your muscles are very tight.

Types of Stretching

Static Stretching is very slow and constant stretching. This type of stretch has a straight forward start and ending position. This position is normally held for 10-30 seconds without movement.

Dynamic Stretching is stretching carried out with **10 or more repetitions of the same movement.** This helps increase your range of motion while exercising. These stretches are very specific to the work out. It is important to emphasize the key action at hand. For example: When doing “Running A’s” your focus should be on your knee moving to 90 degrees and your opposite arm following. In this particular article, we won’t focus or elaborate on Dynamic Stretching, but instead leave that for another article.

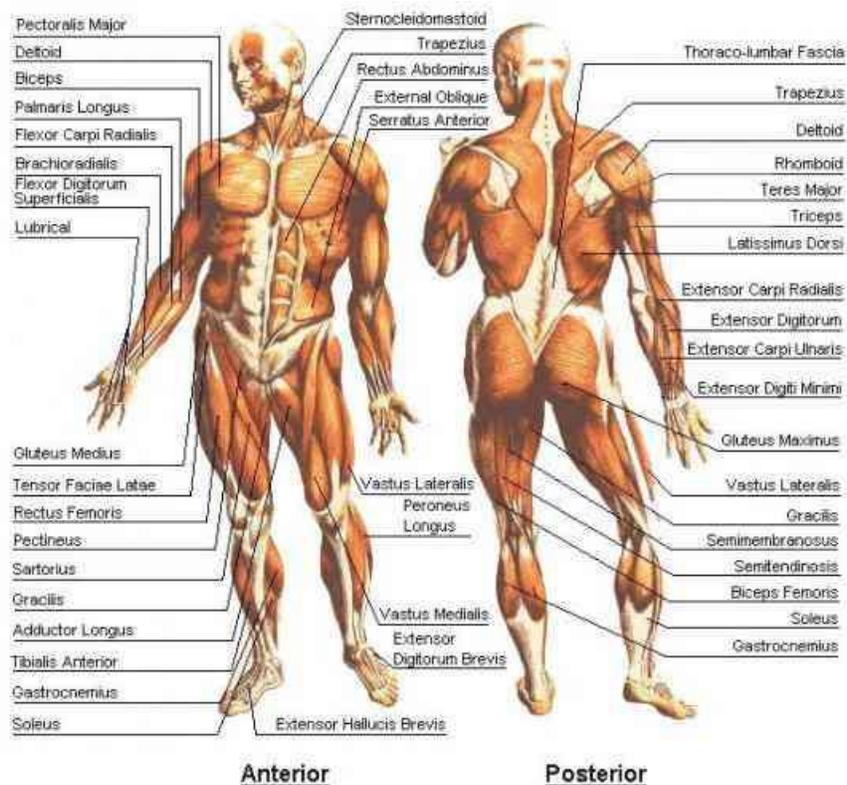
PNF (proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation) was originally developed for rehabilitation. It has since expanded to the athletic world. PNF is considered an optimal stretching method to increase range of motion. PNF stretching involves a shortening of the opposing muscle to place the target muscle in the stretch. During PNF stretching there are 3 specific phases of contraction that are used: hold-relax, contract-relax, and hold-relax with antagonist (main muscle) contraction.

Hold—Relax: this is a technique used to relax the muscle to gain range of motion. This is done by taking the limb/body part you want to stretch and moving it in a pain free range so there is a contraction sustained.

Contract—Relax: this begins the same way as Hold-Relax but this time there is a mild discomfort for 10 seconds then your partner stops and holds for 30 seconds.

Hold—Relax with antagonist contraction (opposite muscle): This begins the same way as Contract – Relax but there is a 3rd phase. In the 3rd phase, your partner provides muscular resistance to the desired “release” direction of the stretch, stopping or holding the muscle in tension for 10 seconds, before releasing and relaxing it. With this technique, your final stretch should be greater than your first stretch.

For an example of PNF, [click here](#)



Muscles of the body

Tool for stretching

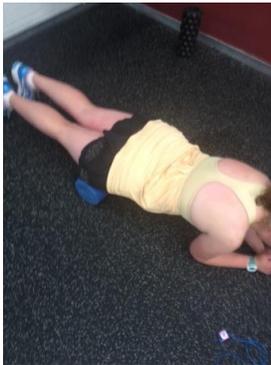


Foam Roller

Helps improve balance and promotes flexibility and myofascial release. (fascia are very thin, tough layers wrapped around most structures in the body)

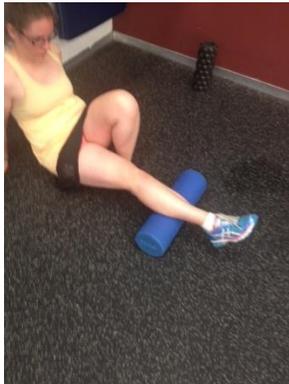
Commonly used on It band, hamstring and quadriceps for recovery

Using the foam roller examples:



Quadriceps

Put yourself into the plank position and place the roller below your hips. Move the foam roller by moving your elbows. Remember don't let the foam roller go over your joints and breathe.



Calf

Sit on the floor. Place the foam roller under your calf or calves. Place your hands behind you and move by pushing your bent leg forward. You can also move by moving your butt back. Remember to not go over your knees or ankles.



Iliotibial Band (ITB)

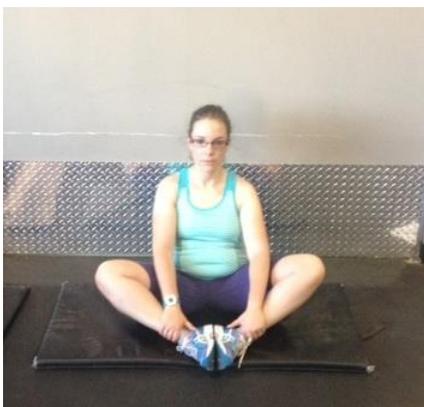
Lie on the left side with the foam roller at the side of your body. Bend your right leg over your left leg and put for full foot of the floor. Move by moving your bottom leg toward your hand.

Static Stretching



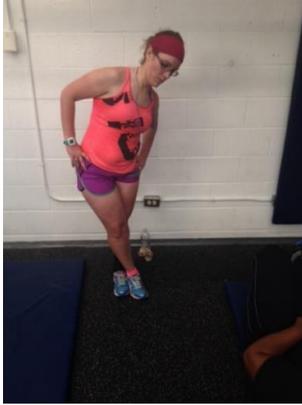
Adductor stretch (*adductor brevis, adductor longus, adductor magnus, aka adductors*)

Stand with your feet wider than hip-width apart and turn your toes out. Bend over to the one side. One leg should be bent, one leg straight with your toes ahead. Remember not to let your knee pass your toes.



Butterfly stretch (*Adductor brevis, adductor longus, adductor magnus and gluteal muscles. Aka adductors and glutes*)

Sit on the floor/ground with a tall posture with your feet straight out in front of you. Ease your feet up towards your body and place the soles of your shoes together. Put your hands on your laces and pull your feet into your groin. Try to keep your legs close to the ground as possible. Do not bounce, keep your body straight.



Standing IT (Iliotibial Band) Stretch

Stretch to the right side; right foot behind the left, toes out at about 45 degrees. Put your right hand on thigh on the wall and your left hand on your left hip. Keep your chest up and push your hip toward the sky.



Quadriceps stretch (focus on: Rectus Femoris)

From the above hip flexor stretch position, grab your foot behind you and bring your heel toward your glutes. You should feel a stretch in your quadriceps and the inside your leg.



Seated spiral twist (oblique, IT band)

Sit on the floor with both legs. Bend your left leg and cross it over your right. Put your hand on your left knee and gently pull. Repeat on to the other side.



Hip Flexor stretch (Illiopsaos, Quadriceps, Soleus).

Bend on your right knee and position your foot flat on the floor in front of you. Keep both legs at 90 degree angles and hold your upper body straight up, with hands

on your hips. Lean forward, and put most of your weight on left leg. Then repeat on right.



Hamstring stretch (Hamstrings, erector spinae)

Sit on the floor/ground with both legs out in front of you. Bend one leg and place alongside of the opposite leg's knee. Relax. Bend forward at your hips with your back straight. Keep one arm above the straight leg and the other arm on the bent leg with your hand on your shoe.



Standing quadriceps stretch (quadriceps)

Stand with your feet together, then bend one knee and hold your ankle. Remember to stand upright (not curving), to hold your foot close to your buttocks and to tighten your abdominal muscles. You can touch the wall or hold something for balance. Repeat on both sides.



Pretzel stretch (gluteus maximus, gluteus medius and gluteus minimus Aka glutes)

Take a mat and lie on your back and bend 1 leg. Straighten your other leg up to the sky and put your foot of your bent leg on top of the straight leg. Pull your straight leg towards your chest and bend.



Gluteal stretch (gluteus maximus, gluteus medius and gluteus minimus Aka. glutes)

Stand with both legs together beside a wall. Put one hand on the wall for balance. Place one foot on the opposite leg, and bend at your hips.

Make sure your knee doesn't go passed the tip of your opposite shoe. Remember to stand with your back straight.



(on left) Calf stretch (*Soleus, gastrocnemius.*
Aka calf muscles)

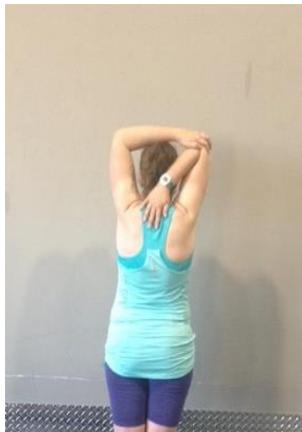
Stand tall with one leg in front of the other with your hands a flat surface at shoulder height. Put your leg further away from the wall and keep straight. Press you heel down to the ground



(on right) Wall calf stretch
(*Gastrocnemius, soleus and Achilles*)

Stand with both your feet away from the wall (about two feet away) and place the

ball of your right foot against the wall, while your heel stays on the ground. Keep both your legs straight while doing this and both arms bent on the wall.



Tricep stretch (*triceps brachii Aka tris*)

Put your legs shoulder width apart and place your hand on your upper back with your elbow towards the sky.

Place your other hand on your elbow and gently pull towards your head



Shoulder stretch (*rotator cuff muscles*)

Bring one arm across the body at chest height and hold it in place with your opposite arm. Keep your back straight.

Special request - this is a dynamic stretch that will help with upper back and shoulder tightness. They are called Lewis circles. Please enjoy video – [click here](#).

References:

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