

Pepa's Stretching Regimen

Why stretch after exercise?

First, stretching after exercise is the most efficient way to remove pressure from your muscles and tendons. Tendonitis, or tendon inflammation, is a very common injury, related to repetitive movement during exercise. Muscles can only be stretched efficiently when warm after working out, and tendon pressure goes away much faster if stretched immediately - lowering the possibility of developing long term inflammation.

Second, during aerobic activities we never use the antagonist muscles the same way. When one side's muscles are used more or differently than the opposite, this creates an imbalance around the joints, putting them out of alignment and leading to the feeling of stiffness in the joints after muscles cool down. Stretching the muscles right after they have been used balances the pressure around the joints, keeps them aligned and prevents joint injuries.

When does the stretching have to be done?

You have about 5 to 15 minutes after the effort is done to stretch before the muscles cool down, depending on the weather, your age, or the type of metabolism you have. The sooner after exercise you stretch the better.

Stretching after exercise needs to be quick. You shouldn't over stretch already tired muscle. Stretching after exercise should take no longer than 5-6 minutes. You need to accept after exercise stretching as a part of the exercise.

What is the recommended way to stretch after exercise?

The most efficient way is the 2 step or stage stretching. Stretch to the threshold when you start to feel the "burn" in the muscle. Hold there for about 5 to 10 seconds depending on the intensity of the feeling. Very soon the level of sensitivity lowers without changing your position. At this point, go a little further so that the sensation gets more intense again. Hold for a few more seconds and that is it. Move to the next muscle group.

Post exercise stretching is important enough that if you have limited time to exercise, you will benefit more if you cut the exercise time by 5 minutes and use this time to stretch instead.

All of the following stretches are meant to be used with the previously described two stage stretching method:

- Stretch to the point when you start to feel the "burn" in the muscle
- Hold there for about 5 to 10 seconds depending on the intensity of the feeling. Very soon the level of sensitivity lowers without changing your position.
- Go a little further so that the sensation gets more intense again and hold for a few more seconds.



1. Hamstrings. Put one leg up on a higher surface. Lean forward.



2. Quads and Hip Flexors. Flex your knee to bring your foot toward your behind. Grip your ankle with your hand on the same side (i.e. right ankle held in right hand) and hold for 5-10s. Pull the leg back a bit further and hold for a few more sec.

If not flexible enough to be comfortable in this position, try this alternate: Step forward, bend your front leg keeping your back leg straight and lean back.



3. Inner thighs. Legs about shoulder distance apart. Tuck your hip in, lean your body to the same side.



4. Inner thighs 2. Put your leg on a higher surface, like a chair or a step. Rotate the foot up to 90 degrees so it is parallel to the floor. Bend at the waist, reaching for a point right next to your standing leg.



5. Calves. Best done on the stairs. Body weight on the front leg (the leg that won't be stretched). Put the toes on your back leg at the edge of the stair, lower the heel.



6. Calves 2. Front leg bent, back leg straight, heel on the ground. Push against the wall.



7. Upper arm. Use something for a stopper - like a pole or wall. Arm straight, palm into the wall or toward the pole. Twist your body away from your arm. Turn your palm over and repeat the stretch.



8. Mid-back/lats. Hold a pole, relaxed arms crossed one over the other, with your feet close to the wall, back arched forward. As you keep your arms fully relaxed, move your hips up and forward till you feel the stretch.



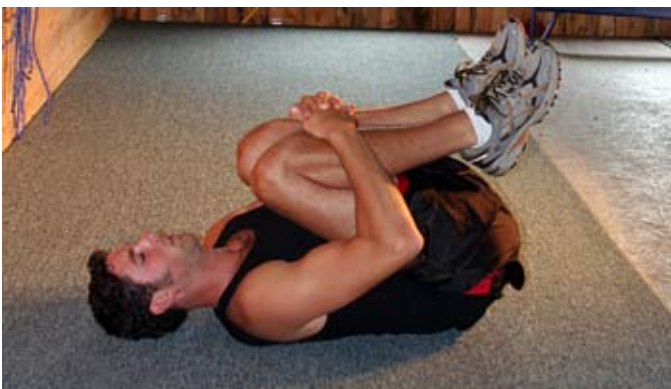


9. Neck. Relax your shoulders. Lean your head to the side, pull up and forward at the same time.



10. Gluts. Lay on your back. Bend your knees, feet on the floor. Cross one ankle over the knee on your other leg. Grip the leg that is straight from inside and pull it to your body.

11. Low back. Lay on your back. Bring one knee up so your leg makes a 90 degree angle. Twist at the waist, and try to reach to the floor on your other side with your knee as you keep your shoulders down on the floor.



12. Low back 2. Bring both knees to your chest.



13. Partner Calf stretch. As you partner lays down on the floor, fully relaxed. Grip one of the ankles, one palm under one above, creating a loose grip around it. Use your weight to pull back for a few sec.