

MAINTAINING A HEALTHY BACK WHILE EXERCISING

There is no substitute for proper conditioning and its role in preventing injury or minimizing the impact of injuries sustained during participation. It is important to take proper precautions to maintain a healthy back while exercising.



WARM UP

Warm-ups are a must before doing any sort of activity. Warming up means five to ten minutes of light aerobic activity just prior to the exercise session. Low-impact activities, such as walking, will help gradually increase the flow of warmed blood to the muscles and ligaments of the back. The purpose of a warm-up is to acclimate the muscles to a more intense activity level gradually enough to prevent injury.

STRETCH

When it's time to hit the sports field, the treadmill or an aerobics class, stretching should be a top priority. Stretching helps to increase flexibility, helps increase blood flow to your muscles and helps prevent injury. Avoid bouncing during stretches to avoid straining or over-stretching the muscle.

COOL DOWN

After you have finished exercising, don't ever neglect the cool-down, which allows your muscles to return to their normal relaxed state. Without this important step, you run the risk of having your muscles tighten up or cramp. The cool-down period after exercise must include stretching. During a cool-down, your muscles are still warm from exercising, and are very receptive to stretching. Stretching relieves muscle tightness, which is one cause of back pain. Stretching also helps to balance the action of muscles, enhancing ideal alignment and relieving joint strain.

Shoulder Stretch

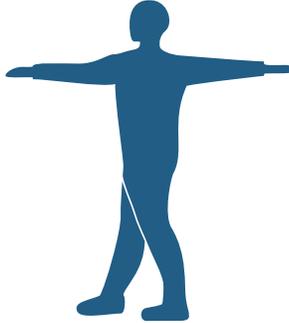
The shoulder stretch helps warm up the muscles surrounding the shoulder in preparation for activities and sports like baseball and football that require the frequent use of the arms.



- 1 Bring your right arm across chest
- 2 Place left hand on right elbow and pull it toward left side until a stretch in right upper arm and shoulder is felt
- 3 Hold for 10-15 seconds, then relax and repeat the stretch on other arm

Back Stretch

If you're going to be changing directions quickly or bending your back in any way, you'll want to stretch out your back muscles.



- 1 Stand with feet more than shoulder-width apart, with hands stretched to side
- 2 Slowly twist torso to left and right so you can feel a stretch throughout your back, do 10-15 rotations
- 3 Bend at the waist to left, back straight, hold for five seconds, bend to right and hold for another 5 seconds
- 4 Repeat the back stretches three to four times each

Hamstring Stretch

The hamstrings are a major muscle group located on the back of your upper leg and are used to push off for running and jumping.



- 1 Stand straight up with feet close together
- 2 Cross left foot over right foot and bend over until a stretch in right hamstring is felt
- 3 Hold for 10-15 seconds, repeat for other leg

Groin Stretch

Activities and sports that involve running, jumping or lunging require you to use your groin muscles, located on the upper part of the inside of your thighs.



- 1 Stand with legs spread and hands on hips for balance
- 2 Bend right knee and lean body to the right, keeping left foot on the floor until a stretch in groin is felt
- 3 Hold for 10-15 seconds, relax and repeat for the right side, and repeat 2 or 3 times per leg