

Flexibility Exercises for Young Athletes

Staying injury-free throughout the sports season requires a proper stretching program. Here are some stretching exercises that doctors from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons believe to be a good general set of flexibility exercises for young athletes.

Flexibility is a key component to preventing injury. Stretching before athletic activity helps prepare the muscles for exercise. Stretching after exercise has proven to be even more important for preventing injury.

For maximum benefit, young athletes should stretch each of the major lower body muscle groups before and after sporting activity. The exercises below provide options for stretching those large muscle groups.

Directions

Be sure to warm up before doing any of these stretches. Good examples of warm up activities are slowly running in place or walking briskly for a few minutes.

Athletes must do the exercises carefully, speed is not important. Never bounce a stretch. Bouncing can cause muscle strains and other injuries.

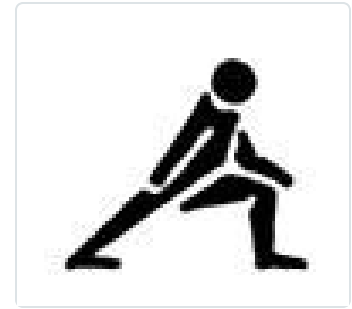
Because stretching may aggravate an existing injury, injured athletes should consult an athletic trainer or physical therapist about an appropriate flexibility program.

Forward Lunges

Kneel on the left leg, placing the right leg forward at a right angle. Lunge forward, keeping the back straight. Stretch should be felt on the left groin.



Hold for five seconds.
Repeat three to six times.
Repeat on opposite leg.



Side Lunges

Stand with legs apart, bending the left knee while leaning toward the left. Keep the back straight and the right leg straight.

Hold for five seconds.
Repeat three to six times.
Repeat on opposite leg.



Cross-Over

Stand with legs crossed, keeping the feet close together and the legs straight. Try to touch the toes.



Hold for five seconds.
Repeat three to six times.
Repeat with the opposite leg.



Standing Quad Stretch

Stand supported by holding onto a wall or chair. Pull the foot behind to the buttocks. Try to keep knees close together.

Hold for five seconds.
Repeat three to six times.

Seat Straddle Lotus

Sit down, placing the soles of the feet together and drop the knees toward floor. Place the forearms on the inside of the knees and push the knees toward the ground. Lean forward from the hips.

Hold for five seconds.

Repeat three to six times.



Seat Side Straddle

Sit with legs spread, placing both hands on the same shin or ankle. Bring the chin toward the knee, keeping the leg straight.

Hold for five seconds.

Repeat three to six times.

Repeat exercise on the opposite leg.



Seat Stretch

Sit with the legs together, feet flexed, and hands on the shins or ankles. Bring the chin toward the knees.

Hold for five seconds.

Repeat three to six times.



Knees to Chest

Lie on the back with knees bent. Grasp the tops of knees and bring them out toward the armpits, rocking gently.

Hold for five seconds.

Repeat three to five times.





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