



Proper Warm-Up: More Than Just Stretching

– Bob McCloughan, PT- Physical Therapist & Director at Newsome & McCloughan Physical Therapy Center, Wheaton

The goals of a warm-up are to prevent injury and to prepare the body for optimal performance. A warm-up consisting of static stretches does not address either of these goals. A proper warm-up needs to include the following phases:

1. Increase core body temperature, i.e. break a sweat.
2. Attain full dynamic flexibility. This is stretching with movement not just holding a given position.
3. Sport specific drills. These should include all the components of a given sport or activity done at a sub maximal effort progressing to maximal effort.

A proper warm-up also needs to include the whole body: upper extremities, lower extremities and trunk. Each part of the body should be included when addressing each phase. For example, when increasing core temperature, jogging is good for lower extremities, but doesn't include the upper extremities or trunk. Arm swings, push-ups, sit-ups and lower trunk rotations are good ways to include the whole body. Activities such as rope skipping, jumping jacks or burpees include more than one area of the body.

The whole body also needs to be included when addressing the phase of dynamic flexibility. As discussed earlier, dynamic flexibility is stretching with movement. The amount of flexibility a person has when stretching statically can be very different from the amount of flexibility they have with movement. Examples of dynamic flexibility exercises for the trunk would include: side bending, shoulder rotation and back bending, forward flexion in standing and supine positions. Standing leg swing forward, backward and side to side to end range, as well as high knee, straight knee and carioca running are good exercises for lower extremity dynamic flexibility. Arm swings in multiple planes effectively loosen up the shoulders and upper extremities.

The last phase of a good warm-up is sport specific drills. These drills should be components of a sport or activity done slowly at first and repeated at progressively faster speeds. Components are also combined to gradually prepare the body for all the movements needed to perform a sport or activity.

Many sports or exercise related injuries can be avoided when care is taken to prepare the entire body for all the movement patterns in the sport or exercise.



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