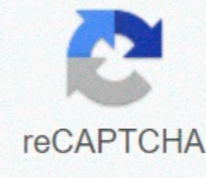




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What are good stretches to do before running

Prevent workout injuries by warming up your muscles before every run or workout. Image Credit: Yolanda Cano/Demand Media Skipping pre-run stretches or warm-up sessions is a recipe for a workout injury. Running with muscles that aren't properly prepped can result in a muscle strain that keeps you off your feet — and off the road or trail — for days, weeks or even months. In fact, running statistics show that at least 50% of regular runners get injured each year, according to Yale Medicine. Starting with a five- to 10-minute jog or walk, followed by dynamic stretching pre-run helps prepare your muscles. Focus on stretching the major muscle groups you'll be using — quads, hamstrings, glutes and hip flexors — and don't forget moves that also warm up your abs, back and calves. Static vs. Dynamic Stretches Before Running Dynamic stretches (ones that incorporate movement and take joints through their full range of motion) are generally better for pre-run stretching warm-ups than static stretches, which are ones held for extended periods of time. They not only better prepare your muscles for the workout to follow but may also provide a performance advantage over static stretches, according to a 2006 study published in the Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research. Spend eight to 10 minutes doing the following dynamic stretches before running, says athletic performance coach Hannah Schultz, CSCS. And save static stretches, which you can hold for 30 seconds to two minutes, for after your run to help with recovery, says triathlon coach Scott Seamster, CSCS. The Best Pre-Run Stretches Ready to run? Here are eight stretches to do before running that hit your quads, hamstrings, glutes, hip flexors, abs, back and calves. And remember: It's important not to overstretch before your workout. Just take the stretch to the point where you feel resistance, not pain or discomfort. Walking lunges strengthen and stretch the entire lower body. Image Credit: Yolanda Cano/Demand Media Not only do walking lunges loosen up the major muscles used while running — specifically, the quads and hip flexors — but they also simulate the forward motion of running, which makes them particularly useful as a pre-run stretch, says Seamster. Stand with your feet together, and then take a long step forward with your right foot. Bend the front knee to 90 degrees and the back knee until it almost touches the ground. Stay here for a few seconds before rising up and take another big step forward on your left leg to get the stretch on your left side. Continue this way for about 10 lunges (five on each side). Your hip flexors are relatively small but have a huge impact on performance. Image Credit: Yolanda Cano/Demand Media If you sit at a desk all day, you probably have tight hip flexors, since they're constantly in a state of flexion. This makes this pre-run stretch extra important before you work out, says Schultz. Start in a lunge with your front knee at 90 degrees. Begin to straighten your back leg, so you feel a stretch along the front of your back thigh. Keep your front knee aligned over your toes. Raise your arms over your head and hold for a few seconds, and then release. Continue in a dynamic motion, shifting forward as you raise your arms up, and then lowering your arms as you come back to the starting position. Repeat five times on each side. Your core needs to be warmed up for a run, too. Image Credit: Yolanda Cano/Demand Media Side stitches are a common complaint among runners, but fitness expert Stew Smith, CSCS, says you can help prevent them by doing this torso stretch before running. You can perform this from a standing position (pictured above), or as Schultz recommends, you can add a side stretch to the hip flexor stretch from the previous stretch. Bring your arms over your head. Keeping your abdominals tight, lean to the right, bending at the waist. Hold for a few seconds, and then lean to the left. Do this movement dynamically, holding for one or two breaths on each side before switching. Warm up your hips and core at the same time. Image Credit: Yolanda Cano/Demand Media Schultz recommends doing this variation of yoga's classic Pigeon pose to stretch the glutes and the ilioibial (IT) band that runs along the outer thigh. From seated, fold your right knee in front of you on the floor so your knee is pointing out to the right slightly and the outside of your thigh and shin are on the floor. Extend your left leg behind you, keeping your leg straight and the top of your thigh, shin and foot on the ground. Add a torso twist by bringing your right hand up behind your right ear, and then twisting to your left so your elbow comes across your body. Repeat five to eight times on each side. Your hips bear a lot of force while you're running, so opening up the joints and muscles of that area before hitting the pavement can help prevent injury. A few minutes of hip circles is an easy way to do this. Stand with your hands on your hips and your feet hip-width apart. Circle your hips in one direction, almost as if you're hula-hooping. Make the circles wider and wider until you're working your full range of motion. To deepen the stretch, on the last round, pause briefly at the front, back, left and right points in the circle. Repeat for six to 10 rotations in one direction, and then switch directions. 6. Around-the-World Lunge Warm up and stretch all the major muscles of your legs with this lunge variation that gets you to move in all direction. "I like to work every plane of motion," Schultz says. "This helps to keep the hips as open as possible." Start with your left leg stationary and lunge backward with your right foot, holding the stretch for a moment. Come back to center and lunge forward with your right foot. Follow with a side lunge, lunging out to your right and holding for a moment. Last in the rotation, do a curtsy lunge — bringing your right leg behind your left leg and bending your knees as if you're curtsyng. Repeat this lunge pattern five times, and then switch sides, lunging with your left leg this time. Good of calf raises help strengthen and prime you for an injury-free run. Image Credit: Yolanda Cano/Demand Media Every time your foot leaves the ground during a run, your calf muscles contract to make that happen. Give them some pre-run love by doing a simple, dynamic calf raise. Stand on the edge of a stair so that only the balls of your feet are on the stair and your heels are hanging over the edge. (Stand on flat ground if you don't have access to stairs.) Hold onto a stair rail for balance, if necessary. Rise up on your toes, and then slowly lower your heels so that they come below the stair and you feel a stretch through your calf muscle. Hold the stretch for a moment before rising up again and repeating. You can also do the stretch on one foot at a time. A classic stretch, this move targets the front of your thigh — your quadriceps. Image Credit: Yolanda Cano/Demand Media Open up your hip flexors and quadriceps with a dynamic version of this classic stretch. Use a wall for support or challenge your balance by performing the stretch without support. Bend your right knee and grab your right foot or ankle from the outside. Pull your foot in toward your right buttock and hold it there for a count of 10. Keep your torso upright and your head and shoulders aligned over your hips. Repeat three to five times before switching sides.

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