



Let's Talk Running... Strengthening & Stretching?

“Don't wait until it is too late to start strengthening and stretching!”

Unfortunately, many runners wait too long before they start stretching or strengthening. The key is PREVENTION. Addressing your flexibility and strength imbalances is no less important than having the appropriate running shoes or the proper diet. If we wait until we have an injury, then we are “behind the eight-ball” and achieving our personal goal becomes even more difficult.

The time to start working on strength and flexibility was actually back in October, but it is not too late to start now while the mileage is still relatively low. When you get into the middle of the training schedule, it becomes more difficult to strength train and run 25-30 miles in a week. Research has shown that it takes around 12 weeks to achieve permanent strength changes in our muscles, so if we wait and start in March, we will be fighting an uphill battle. As for stretching, unfortunately that will be an ongoing process.

Areas to focus on for strengthening include, but not limited to, hip abductors (outside muscles of the hip) and hip lateral (outward) rotators. These two muscle groups can be addressed simply by lying on your side performing a straight leg raise in two different positions. First, with the toe pointed forward, then with the toe rotating toward the ceiling. The focus will be on high repetitions (3 sets of 15-25 reps.) and low weight (in this case, gravity).

As for stretching, the biggest areas of imbalance are usually, but not limited to, the heel cords, hip flexors (in front of leg) and iliotibial (IT) band. It is recommended that you warm up first (10 minute run or bike), and then perform the necessary stretching exercises. Research has also shown that low load, prolonged stretching (3 reps. of 30 second hold each) is most effective. Stretching should be pain-free and avoidance of ballistic (bouncing) movements. Ballistic stretching should not be confused with dynamic stretching, which is done in a controlled and rhythmic manner. The biggest misconception is that a runner will “ruin a good run by stopping and stretching” in most cases. With the exception of stretching your IT band during a run, you may actually have a better run if you stop to stretch when starting to notice tightness or soreness in a certain muscle group.

As a distance runner, you can expect to notice some discomfort during your long training season. If distance running was easy, everyone would do it! However, we can try to prevent the over-use injuries through proper training progression, appropriate footwear, diet, and having good balance in strength and flexibility.

Food for thought: #1- *“You can't run into shape”*
#2- *“Stop and stretch if you need to”*

Good luck with your training.

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