

Team JDRF to Cure Diabetes

Six Simple Stretches for Runners

Below are some of the basic stretches that all runners should do to increase flexibility and help prevent injury:

HAMSTRING STRETCH 1

The hamstring is the muscle that runs from below the knee up into the buttocks. There are multiple functions of the hamstring, from bringing the heel toward the buttocks, to hip extension, which moves the leg backward. One way to perform this stretch is by putting your foot on a waist-high stationary object (sturdy chair, railing, etc.) and slowly leaning forward, reaching down the shin until you feel a stretch in the hamstring.

HAMSTRING STRETCH 2

Another way to stretch your hamstring is to lie on your back, keeping the back flat and your eyes focused upward. Hold the back of one thigh with both hands and with the leg slightly bent, pull the thigh into a 90-degree position. Then slowly straighten the knee. As your flexibility increases, you can achieve a better stretch by pulling your thigh closer to your chest—but remember to avoid overstretching.

QUADRICEPS STRETCH

The quadriceps is the muscle in the front of the thigh, important for lifting your knees and increasing your speed. To do this stretch, hold onto a stationary object for balance with one hand and use the opposite hand to grab the front of your ankle, pulling it toward your buttocks. It is best to keep your back straight and not allow the knee to drift forward ahead of the stance leg. This will give you the most effective stretch.

PIRIFORMIS STRETCH

The piriformis muscle is responsible for lateral rotation of the hip. This is important to athletes who have to change direction, such as tennis or basketball players. For runners, keeping the piriformis muscle loose is important for overall flexibility. To do this stretch, lie on your back and cross your legs just as you might while sitting in a chair. Hold the “under” leg with both hands, pull the knee toward your chest until you feel the stretch in your buttocks and hips.

CALF STRETCH (GASTROCNEMIUS)

The gastrocnemius muscle, along with the soleus, is located in the back of the calf. It is the calf muscle that actually propels your leg across your grounded foot while running. Lean against a wall or other stationary object, both palms against the object. The leg you want to stretch is back, several feet from the wall, your heel firmly positioned on the floor. Make sure to keep your back foot straight during the stretch. Your other leg is flexed about halfway between your back leg and the wall. Start with your back straight and gradually lunge forward until you feel the stretch in your calf.

CALF STRETCH (SOLEUS)

The soleus is the other major muscle in the calf, located deep to the gastrocnemius. Most runners only stretch the gastrocnemius muscles but it is also important to stretch the soleus muscle. It is important for planting the foot on the ground before your push off. Position yourself similar to the gastrocnemius stretch, with the back straight and palms against the wall. The difference is that you start in a semiseated position with your legs bent, your buttocks dropped. Gently lean into the wall until you feel the stretch in your lower calf.