

Stretch *After* You Run

A major misconception about running is that you must stretch beforehand. In fact, the opposite is the case: **You should stretch after a workout.** If you really feel you should stretch because you want to loosen up or warm up your muscles before the serious work, jog or walk for 5–10 minutes and then stretch.

The best thing to do is to start your run very slowly, then ease into a training pace 5–10 minutes later. **The idea is not to stretch a cold muscle.** If you're planning to do a speed workout or race, jog for about a mile, stretch, do striders, and then do the speed workout or race.

Before stretching, you need to warm up your muscles. Don't stretch past the point of slight discomfort. If your muscles are still cold, don't try to stretch them like a rubber band, especially if you haven't run in a while.

It's very important to remember to stretch after a run. A workout isn't over until, as part of your cool-down period, you stretch thoroughly immediately following the run. You need to make sure you establish the good work habits of successful runners, for whom the stretching period after the run is as important as the run itself.

View stretching as a part of your overall workout. It should be just as natural and routine as jogging to warm up before an event. This is because your legs are most receptive to the benefits of stretching immediately after you run. Stretching 30–40 minutes later when your muscles have cooled down actually increases your chances of causing injury. Your muscles are fatigued and tight after a run, especially after a long or fast-paced one, and stretching can help to alleviate soreness later.

In short, stretch gently and slowly while your muscles are still warm. **One final rule: No bouncing when you stretch. That is called ballistic stretching, and it can cause injuries!**