

STRETCHING

Below are a series of stretches that should be performed during the cool-down process. All can be performed as either a maintenance stretch (8–10 seconds) or a developmental stretch (30 seconds). For a maintenance stretch, take a deep breath and then breathe out as you go into the stretch, count or time for five seconds. Take another deep breath, breathe out and increase the stretch as you do so. Hold for the final five seconds. At first these stretches will feel uncomfortable, but should not be painful. Be strong-willed and stick with them. However, if at any time you do feel pain, stop.

Developmental stretches work in entirely the same way; they are just held for longer. Again take a deep breath, put the stretch on as you breathe out and then hold for around ten seconds. Breathe in deeply again, breathe out and increase the stretch, hold it for ten, then repeat one more time. Try to repeat each 30-second stretch three times when performing developmental stretches.



Single leg hamstring stretch

Tuck the left foot into the groin, but extend the right leg so that it is straight and the left sole nestles into the inside of the right thigh. Reach forward as far as possible and take hold of part of your right leg (the bottom of the foot is your final aim, but to begin with the ankle or shin is fine). Try to bend from the lower back as you stretch and don't round your upper back too much. Keep the leg straight – the back of your knee should be on the floor. Repeat for the left leg. You should feel the stretch on the back of the upper part of the outstretched leg.



Double leg hamstring stretch

Similar to the single leg hamstring stretch, but the double leg involves sitting with both legs outstretched and then reaching as far down them as possible (taking hold of the bottoms of the feet, ankles or shins). Again, try to bend from the lower back, not the upper back. Stretch should be felt in the backs of both legs.



Groin (adductor) stretch

Sit up with your legs bent as if you are going to cross them. Put the soles of your feet together (I usually remove my trainers) and pull your heels in towards your groin, keeping your soles together. Take hold of your ankles with your hands and place your elbows on to the inside of your knees. While keeping your soles together, heels in, hands on ankles, use your elbows to push down through your knees, flattening the legs out and stretching the groin. You should feel a stretch on the inside of both legs.



Glutes (backside) stretch

Sit on the floor with your left leg outstretched and right leg bent up. Staying seated with your left leg outstretched, place your right foot over the left leg and allow it to nestle on the outside of the left thigh, parallel to it. Your right leg should now be up across your chest. Keeping your right foot on the floor, hug your right leg into your chest with your arms. Repeat with the opposite leg. You should feel the stretch in the buttock of the bent leg.



Quadriceps stretch

Roll over on to your right side, ensuring your right leg is straight. Bend your left leg and take hold of your left foot and pull it up towards your backside. Try to keep your knees level with each other, and your shoulders, hips and knees in line. This will avoid structural injuries. To increase the stretch, pull the foot further into your backside and ease your hips in a forward direction. Repeat, lying on your opposite side, for the other leg. You should feel the stretch at the front of the bent leg.

