

The Runners World Complete Guide To Stretching

Basic Stretches

This eight-stretch routine will keep you flexible in all your main running muscles. If you need to work more on a specific muscle, practise the deeper stretches; and once a week, try to add the whole-body stretches.

Remember:

- Don't stretch cold muscles. It's far better to stretch after a run than before
- Do stretch lightly before speedwork, after a 10-minute warm-up jog
- Ease into each stretch: don't bounce or force it.
- Before speedwork, hold each stretch for 10-15 seconds
- After a run, hold each stretch for 30 seconds; repeat once or twice on each leg

1. Lying hamstring stretch with cord

Keep your upper body relaxed and both legs straight as you pull one leg towards you. A variation: lying as before, bend the upper knee in towards your chest. Holding the cord around the foot of the bent leg, push away with the foot, trying to straighten the leg against the tension of the cord. You should feel the stretch higher up the hamstring.



2. Lying gluteal stretch against wall

Keep the ankle of your front leg just below your knee and ensure that you're close enough to the wall for your lower back to be off the floor. As gravity gently brings your lower back towards the floor, you'll feel a stretch in the muscles around the side of your buttocks. Adjust the angle of your hips and front knee to intensify the stretch.



3. Groin stretch

Hold your feet and gently use your leg muscles to move your knees towards the ground. Keeping a straight back and bringing your feet closer to your body intensifies the stretch.



4. Gastrocnemius (upper calf) stretch

Keep the back leg straight and push the back heel into the ground. Keeping a straight upper body and gently lifting up your hips helps. There shouldn't be much pressure on the front foot.



5. Soleus (lower calf) stretch

Stand closer to the wall and bend one leg, keeping the foot flat on the floor. You should feel a stretch in your lower calf. Leaning towards the wall intensifies the stretch; there should be little pressure on the other foot.



6. Iliotibial band stretch

Place one foot around the other, with both feet flat on the ground. Keeping both legs straight, lean your hips towards the side of your rearmost foot (so, if your right foot is rearmost, lean your hips to the right). You should feel the stretch down the outside of your leg and around your hip – if you are very stiff, it may take a few times before you feel anything.



7. Hip flexor stretch

Keep your hips squared forwards and your upper body vertical; slumping forwards reduces the stretch.



8. Standing quadriceps stretch

Flex your foot and keep your body straight to maximise the stretch through the front of your leg. You can put one hand on a wall if you need balance.



Deeper Stretches

If you're comfortable with the basic stretches, try these more advanced alternatives.

1. Kneeling quadriceps stretch against wall

Your rearmost shin and the top of your foot should be flat against the wall, as you lean back to increase the stretch in the front of your thigh. Take care if you have ankle problems, and stay tall in your upper body to avoid compressing your lower back.



2. Bent-leg standing hamstrings stretch

Be thoroughly warmed up before you attempt this one. With one foot on a chair or ledge, bend your upper leg deeply and move your chest down onto your thigh. Keeping your chest low, gently try to straighten your bent leg.



3. Cross-legged sitting gluteals stretch

Start in a cross-legged position with your back upright. Your shins should be parallel to your body and your feet should be as far out to the sides as you can get them. Keeping a straight back, bend forwards with arms outstretched.



Whole-Body Stretches

These stretch more than one muscle group at once – including your upper body, an often-neglected area in runners.

1. Downward-facing dog

Keep your feet hip-width apart and your hands shoulder-width apart. Keep your legs straight, keep your hips high, and lengthen your heels towards the ground (don't worry if they don't reach). Press your palms and fingers flat into the ground; you should feel as though you're trying to push the floor apart between your hands and feet. Stretches your hamstrings, calves, Achilles tendons, back and shoulders.



2. Lying spinal twist

Start on your back with both legs straight. Hug your right knee in towards your chest, and hook your right foot behind your left knee. Then roll to your left side, so your right knee touches the floor. Extend your right arm towards the floor on your right side at head-height, and turn your head to look along it. Relax into the posture, then repeat on the opposite side. Stretches your gluteals, lower back, upper back, shoulders, arms and chest.



3. Forward-bend shoulder stretch

Keep straight legs, a straight back, and feet hip-width apart. Tense your quads, but don't tense your neck. Putting your hands on your hips before you stand back up avoids possible lower-back strain. Stretches your hamstrings, calves, shoulders, chest and arms.

