

A good and consistent stretching program can save you a lot of trouble and keep you running. Along with training gently and choosing the right shoes, stretching is important to protecting your body. You'll also find that stretching can reduced muscle soreness.

That said, you should be careful about how you stretch. If not done properly, stretching can actually cause injury rather than prevent it.

- Rule number one: **do not bounce**. It's a common mistake, but bouncing risks pulling or tearing the muscle you're trying to stretch and relax.
- Stretch slowly, to avoid contraction reflex.
- Do not stretch beyond the point where you begin to feel tightness in the muscle.
- Do not push through muscle resistance, and
- Never stretch to the point of discomfort or pain.

Build stretching into your regular schedule both before and after your daily run -- it's best to do your pre-run stretching after a gentle warmup run of five or ten minutes, since "warm" muscles stretch more easily.

There are innumerable stretching techniques. Four basic types of stretches include: wall pushups, back scratch, hamstring stretch, heel-to-buttock stretch, and the groin stretch. Repeat each stretch two or three times:



Wall Pushup #1

Stand about three feet from a wall, feet at shoulder width and flat on the ground. Put your hands on the wall with your arms straight for support. Lean your hips forward and bend your knees slightly to stretch your calves.



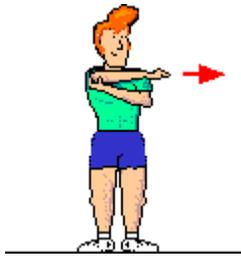
Wall Pushup #2

From the previous position, bend forward to lower your body to waist height. Bring one foot forward with your knee slightly bent. Lift the toes of the front foot to stretch the muscle under the calf. Stretch both legs.



Wall Pushup #3

Put your feet together, rocking back on your heels with your hands on the wall and your arms straight to form a jackknife with your body. This stretches your hips, shoulders, and lower back.



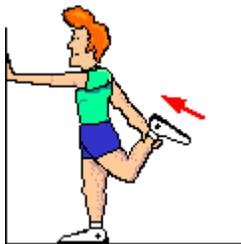
Back Scratch

Grab your elbow with the opposite hand and gently push the elbow up and across your body until your hand reaches down to "scratch" your back. Gently push on your elbow to guide your hand down your back as far as it will comfortably go, stretching your triceps and shoulders. Stretch both arms.



Hamstring Stretch

Lie down with one leg straight up in the air, the other bent with foot flat on the ground. Loop a towel over the arch of the lifted foot, and gently pull on the towel as you push against it with your foot. Push only to the point where your muscles contract. Stretch both legs.



Heel to Buttock

Stand on one foot, with one hand on a wall for balance. Hold the other foot with the opposite hand and raise the heel of the lifted foot to the buttocks (or as close as comfortably possible), stretching your quadriceps. Keep your body upright throughout. Change legs and repeat.



Groin Stretch

Seated, put the soles of your feet together. With your elbows on the inside of your knees, gradually lean forward and gently press your knees toward the ground.

Excepts taken from:

“Stay Loose: Stretches for Runners Incorporate the Cool Running stretching routine into your workouts to reduce muscle soreness and prevent injury.” By Josh Clark Posted Sunday, 31 March, 2002 http://www.coolrunning.com/engine/2/2_1/126.shtml