

STRETCH FOR A BETTER STRIDE

Most runners do some basic stretching, especially the hamstrings. We all have tight hamstrings and so we all know to stretch these muscles. Since down hill running really works your quads, we all stretch these too. And oh, don't forget the calf muscles. We all do those.

There are three more muscle groups to stretch out that can really help your stride. These stretches may not help lengthen your stride, but they will help smooth it out and make you feel more relaxed. You won't fight your own muscles as you run.

The muscle groups are the hip flexors, hip extensors and adductors (inner thighs). These muscles tend to be more in the hip and pelvic region rather than in your thigh and lower leg. You can not have a relaxed stride if your hip flexors and/or extensors are too tight.

There are several muscles that flex the hip. Some of these muscles are in your thigh, which are already being stretched when you do a quad stretch. However, the iliopsoas muscle is in your groin and is often overlooked. It is comprised of the iliacus muscle which connects your pelvis and femur (thigh bone), causing this to flex. The other portion is made up of the psoas muscle, which attaches to the side of your lower spine, connecting again to the femur bone. Together the iliopsoas flexes your hip joint when your trunk is stabilized. These muscles are recruited when you do a complete sit up, rather than a crunch.

If these muscles are too tight, your leg can not extend backward normally when striding. To stretch this muscle, kneel on your right knee. Now place your left foot out in front of your body, like you are going to do a lunge. Lean forward onto your left leg, pushing your pelvis forward (stick your belly out). If done right, you can feel some stretching across your right groin and into the right front thigh. This is almost like doing a lunge, except for kneeling and stretching. Stretch for 30 seconds each leg.

The buttock muscles extend your hips. They provide the power to swing your leg backward when running. They also provide power for doing squats and running up hills. If your buttock muscles are too tight, you can not swing your leg forward comfortably when striding.

To stretch the buttock muscle, lay on your back and bend both knees. Cross your right leg over the left, placing your right ankle on your left knee. Now flex your left knee toward you, stretching the right buttock. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat the other side.

Lastly, the inner thigh muscles (adductors) work in conjunction with the hip flexors. If your inner thigh is too tight, this will also restrict your stride. When

stretching, take a wide stance with your feet pointing forward. Now bend your left knee, leaning sideways and keeping your right knee locked. Stretch your right inner thigh for 30 seconds and repeat on the other side.

If you feel tightness or pain, especially on one side, you may be out of alignment in your low back and/or pelvis. If you can't "stretch it out", you are a good candidate for chiropractic. We have helped runners continue to do what they love to do - keep running!

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