

A Flexible Solution to a Better Game

A proper stretching routine is often neglected when preparing for practice or competition – especially when there are conflicting theories on how to stretch, when to do it and how long we hold each strength. But new research is altering the way we approach stretching.



Maria Sharapova swears by her pre-match stretching routine.

Why stretch?

Stretching is a critical component to maintaining overall musculoskeletal health and is especially important for active populations. When performed correctly, stretching can:

- 1) Improve your performance on the court (improving your flexibility will allow you to change direction faster so you can get to those wide balls easier).
- 2) Increase joint range of motion by decreasing muscle stiffness.
- 3) Decrease risk of injury.
- 4) Decrease pain/discomfort caused by muscle stiffness.

Sport scientists advise that a combination of an active warm-up and stretching is the most effective method to increase flexibility and joint range of motion than either technique used alone. Increased range of motion is especially crucial for tennis players because we are constantly demanding that our bodies reach beyond normal range of motion on the court.

Types of Flexibility Training

1) Static Stretching

Static stretching involves holding one position while isolating specific muscle groups. It is best used during the cool-down period following practice or competition, when the soft tissues are warm. Static stretching performed after activity can help speed the recovery process by decreasing muscle soreness and improving muscle length.

Recent research demonstrates that static stretching performed within 30-60 min before an intense practice or competition may actually decrease muscular strength and power. These effects may last for a short duration, but may have a negative effect on performance. Therefore, static stretching should be performed regularly (ideal=daily), but just not immediately before training/competition.

2) Dynamic Stretching

Dynamic stretching involves movement and stretching motions together. It is best used as part of the warm-up process, and should be performed just prior to practice and competition. For tennis players, dynamic stretching should be performed by mimicking tennis movements, and can be performed easily on the side of the court before starting practice. Some examples of dynamic stretching include:

By Michelle Gebrian



- Arm swings, shoulder circles, leg swings
- Knee and hip rotations
- Lunges, walking squats
- Butt kicks
- Jumping jacks
- Joint rotations
- Simulating tennis strokes without ball contact
- Resistance band exercises

3) Passive Stretching

This is a two-person stretching technique, and is best performed with a trained partner. It's important to maintain a stable spine while being passively stretched. This will help to enhance muscle lengthening by isolating the targeted muscles for each stretch.

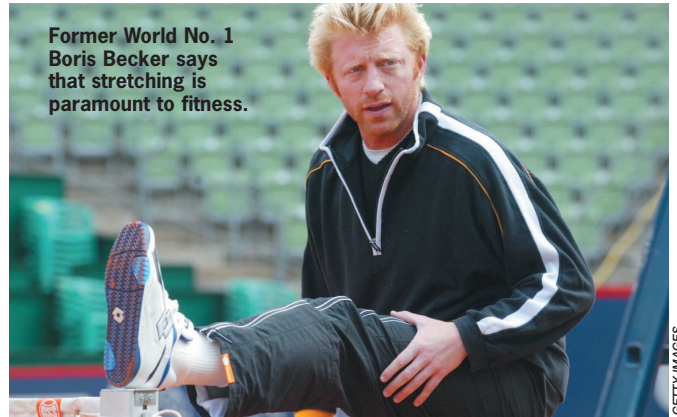
Putting into Practice

Before Practice/Competition

1. Perform a warm-up: low intensity jogging in place or around the court for 5 min; or low intensity stationary bike for 5 min.
2. Dynamic stretching routine as outlined above for about 5-10 min.

After Practice/Competition

1. Cool-Down for about 10 min following match, performing low intensity exercise such as jogging or cycling.
2. Perform static stretching of each major muscle group in arms & legs.



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3. Hold each static stretch for 30-60 seconds; perform 3 repetitions/muscle group. Remember to stretch both your upper & lower body muscles.

By following these guidelines, you'll be on your way to gaining greater flexibility and improving your performance on the court. If your joints are more flexible, you'll be able to get to those hard-to-reach balls, improve your agility and hopefully out-perform your opponent. In the next Health and Fitness column, we will show you some specific stretches which can help improve your flexibility for your tennis game. Until then, good luck with taking your flexibility and performance to the next level. ●

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