

How to Improve:

Flexibility

Why Improve?

Flexibility is important for injury prevention, as well as range of motion. A larger range of motion around the hip or shoulder joint means that you can take a longer running or skating stride, or a larger tennis or baseball backswing, making you more efficient. In addition, you are much less likely to pull a muscle that is accidentally pushed beyond its normal range during a fall (on ice, off your bike, etc.), or a hit (in football, hockey, etc.).

Remember:

Stretch When Warm. Ever tried to pull a piece of chewing gum before it has been chewed? It doesn't stretch very easily and might even break. Once the gum has been chewed (warmed up), it is very easy to stretch. Think of your muscles in the same way. Light stretches or range of motion activities (like arm circles) are OK before activity, but save your major stretches until after your workout – or after a hot bath, when your body temperature is higher than normal. You will notice much greater improvements if you stretch when your muscles are warm.

Slow, controlled movement. Avoid bouncing or jerking stretches. Stretch slowly to the point of tension, (not pain) then hold for 20 – 60 seconds.

Breathe. Each time you exhale, imagine your muscles getting longer and more flexible. RELAX.

Recognize your limits. If you try to force a stretch, your body will react by tightening or contracting the muscle(s) instead of stretching or relaxing them. Flexibility differs widely from one person to the next, so if you try to keep up with your friend, you are likely to injure yourself. Recognize your own limits and stretch with proper technique at all times.

Consistency. Schedule flexibility training as you would strength or cardiovascular training. Perform 2-3 stretches/muscle group, holding each stretch for 20-60 seconds. Perform this routine 3-5 times/week for optimal results.

