

SMART STRETCHES

Try these 4 moves to keep you injury-free throughout your season.



Alex Laws is a former world-ranked triathlete who now owns iCoreSports. As a certified neuromuscular therapist, CHEK practitioner and ACE-certified personal trainer, she has been teaching corrective exercise programs for 15 years and works with professional skateboarders, tennis players, triathletes and surfers to help them prevent and recover from injuries.

the what, when and how of stretching

>> **Stretch 20 minutes before working out to get the best effect.** If you're especially tight, stretch 30 or 40 minutes before you work out, then stretch again at the 20-minute mark.

>> **Hold each stretch for 15 to 20 seconds.** Doing more reps is more beneficial than holding a stretch for a long time.

>> **Don't stretch the sides of your body the same way if they don't feel the same.** If your right quadriceps muscles are tighter than your left, hold the right side's stretch longer than the left's and repeat the stretch one extra time.

>> **Don't bounce when you stretch.** You could strain a muscle.

>> **Do a light stretch after a workout if you feel tight in certain areas.** But stretching postworkout has no benefit for correcting or enhancing your body's dynamics.

For a full stretching video plus other workouts, check out Alex's iCoreSports app, available on iTunes and at icoresports.com (\$2.99 and up).

High school is a critical time for educating your body on the correct way to prepare for, perform and recover from exercise. Running sports like basketball, lacrosse, soccer, track and cross-country involve similar movement patterns and quick changes of direction, which can put stress on joints. So it's important to keep the stabilizing muscles around the joints—ankles, knees and hips—flexible. Notice I didn't say loose, I said flexible, which means strong but with a good range of motion. Time to stretch yourself.

ankles

CALF STRETCHES

For this stretch you'll need a step. Switch sides after performing the sequence.

1. Place the toes of one foot on the step and drop the heel down over the edge. This stretches the larger, more visible of the two major muscles that make up your calf.

2. Bend your opposite knee forward to stretch the smaller of the two major calf muscles.

Basketball, soccer and lacrosse players, as well as runners, will benefit from this stretch. Flexible calves help your foot explode off the ground, they help your feet when making quick changes of direction and they can also help protect your joint if you roll your ankle.



knees

QUADRICEPS STRETCH

1. Quads are usually a runner's tightest muscles. Stretch them by placing the foot of your stretching leg on a Swiss ball, chair or couch. Then bring your opposite leg in front of you with your foot flat on the ground and your knee at a 90° angle.



HIP FLEXOR STRETCH

2. Now lunge the front leg forward to open up and stretch your hips. Any athlete who runs will benefit from this stretch. The tighter your quads, the less stress they can handle. Flexible hips can also increase stride length and reduce stress on your knees when you're making quick direction changes.



hips

BUTT STRETCH

Another important muscle group in hip movement is the gluteus maximus—your rear end.

1. Sit on the ground with your back leg straight out behind you. (Like the back half of a split.)



2. Bend the knee of your front leg 45°, or until you feel the stretch in your hip.

3. Keep your hips squared to the ground, chest up and hands by your side. For a deeper stretch, lean forward and rest your chest on the ground. Basketball players and track and cross-country athletes will benefit most from this stretch, as it limbers up the muscle that helps you jump and leap forward. Don't overdo this stretch, as you don't want to shut your glutes down; you just want to get them flexible. Limber glutes will allow you to lengthen your stride and take some pressure off those poor little calves when running.