

We all know that we should do some kind of a warm-up before we start to exercise. Even so a lot of people get to it without actually having a clue on what, why and how to do so in order to get the most out of the workout.

Usually they start out with some kind of a light aerobic exercise, on the treadmill or the bike, to follow it up with some light static stretching at the most, before they head into the gym. Or maybe they are doing my favourite- I just love the one where 50 fast reps are being banged out on the exercise of choice, like an epileptic penguin wobbling around! As a preparation before attacking the real weights

But if you ask me it's like hunting for rabbit with a cannon, you know you have to use something but aren't sure about what.

A correctly performed warm-up can lead an exceptional workout instead of a mediocre one. So it deserves your full focus and at least some good effort- it may even prolong you career as an athlete if you do it right!

The information I am going to share with you is actually the same kind I use on my top level athletes. If I say Sydney, Athens and Beijing you know which level I'm referring to.

But let us first repeat some basics before going into details. What is the actual function of a warm-up, what use will you have from it? Generally speaking it is to prepare your body for the coming workout or task at hand, and to help it perform optimally, hereby:

- * Raising your body temperature
- * Raising the heart beat
- * Improving your nervous systems impulses (coordination and reaction time improves amongst other things)
- * Increasing your muscle flexibility
- * Lubricating your joints
- * Facilitating your muscles
- * Improving your proprioception

* Preventing injury

In addition the warm up is also a perfect time to gauge your daily form and perhaps make some last minute changes in your workout program accordingly.

Ok back to the “perfect” warm-up. What does it look like? Let’s break it down into three stages:

1. Increasing body temperature
2. Dynamic stretching
3. Transition

1. Increasing body temperature

If possible I would recommend you to start your warm-up with skipping rope. It is easy to bring along and it is cheap, so there should be no problem to get one or use one. Also, by skipping rope you train your reactive strength, which puts you a foundation for the coming plyometric training.

And by judging your timing and coordination while skipping, you can also overview the condition of your nervous system at that time. If you fumble around and have bad timing while jumping and turning the rope (and I don’t mean by the reason of you being an inexperienced rope-skipper), then you may need to make some wise last-minute changes in your workout or warm-up program. Since bad coordination may be an indication of your body not being fully rested and/or you being on your way to overtraining.

I would suggest for this part to take about 5 minutes, or until you break a sweat.

2. Dynamic stretching

The Dynamic stretching part of the warm-up is the most important one of all, partially because it puts the foundation for your flexibility as well as improving your coordination, balance and re-activation of shut-off muscles. I will return to this in a while.

Many choose to do static stretching here instead of dynamic. I would not say it is entirely wrong if it is done so for any of the following reasons:

- * to stretch the antagonistic muscles to the one you are about to train, which can actually improve your workout even more.
- * to stretch specific muscles due to rehab.
- * I also often recommend static stretching for the beginner who may have some difficulties coordinating simultaneous movements.

But primarily I use static stretching after a training session, and if possible, separated from the actual workout. Now I know this is hardcore but if you want to get the absolute most out of your static stretching you should perform it in about 4 hours following a strenuous workout, by which time your nervous system is back into “normal”.

By performing dynamic stretching I’m going to increase my flexibility, lubricate my joints and strengthen my muscles in their full range of motion. This is highly useful in all sports, both as injury prevention and as a performance enhancement.

This part also activates muscles that usually may be shut-off due to years of inactivity. A common muscle to often shut off or become inactivated is the Gluteus Maximus or your butt, even amongst elite level athletes - believe it or not. Try the following: Stand up with your feet together and then try to squeeze each one of your buttocks one at a time. Did you succeed? Congratulations! If you did not, then don’t worry, you are amongst friends! Most people who try this tend to squeeze both buttocks at the same time. By learning to activate these powerful muscles more effectively you are going to improve your performance. Now how come?

The reason why we have a hard time using our gluteals effectively is because of our hip- flexors often being shortened by, amongst other things, way too much sitting down during the days – at work, at home with Oprah or Dr Phil and even at the gym – but I am saving that for another article. This leads to inhibition of the gluteals by the neural connection between the two

muscles, in a fancy way called reciprocal inhibition. This simply means that while one muscle fires the other one is reloading, in this case the gluteals are constantly reloading. When performing the dynamic stretching correctly you will teach your body to function correctly again.

When doing this part of the warm-up I want you to successively increase the range of motion in the exercises - but never force yourself, this will only lead to counterproductive results. It is also of importance that you engage the antagonistic muscle and not only use the momentum to do the work for you. I also suggest you use a broom shaft to gauge your posture. To get the most out of this part you should always strive after “perfect posture”, because if not your joints and muscles will not work in perfect synchronicity!

3. Transition

Now you are ready for the last phase, the transition. This phase prepares you directly for the work to follow. Let's say you are about to Squat, just simply perform this exercise with progressively higher load, (a note here - don't use high reps, 6-8 are plenty. Too many reps may lead to locally increased lactic acid production, which in turn prevent you from using your type II muscle fibres in their fullest! Not good if your goal is strength and mass!), while doing this take the opportunity to perfect your form.

To summarize

1. Skipping rope or use the bike or treadmill if necessary
2. Do dynamic stretching of the muscles you are about to train
3. Progressively use higher loads on the exercise you are about to do

As mentioned earlier this will prepare your body and enhance its ability to perform at a higher level. So do as my coming participants in Beijing, put some serious focus and effort into the warm-up!

Example total body dynamic stretching



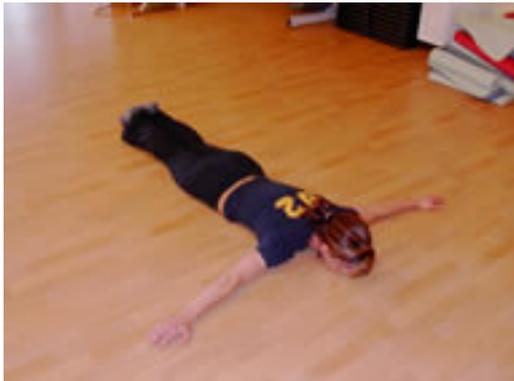
Lunges Cross-legged



Try to keep your legs as straight as possible.



Try to touch your opposite hand with your leg.



Self posture and keep your arms in line with your ears.



Side squat on one side bend as far as you can without rotating.



Sit-ups





Engage and squeeze your shoulder retractors in the bottom position.



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