

Stretches

Adductors: Adductor muscles run along the inner thigh and help pull the legs toward your body. These muscles along with the outer thigh muscles (the Abductors) often get ignored strength-wise as well as when stretching. It's important to keep these muscles stretched and flexible as much as the more obvious running muscles such as the quads and hamstrings. Any one of the following three stretches is good for loosening up the adductors.

1. Sit with your legs stretched out to the side as far as possible. It's okay if your knees are slightly bent. Exhale as you slowly lean forward between your legs with your hands stretched out in front. Hold the stretch for 30-40 seconds, breathing evenly during the hold.

2. Lie on your back with your legs up in the air stretched out against a wall. Gradually increase the stretch between the legs. This is particularly effective after a long run in getting the blood that may have pooled in your legs recirculated helping to reduce inflammation.

3. This stretch not only helps stretch the adductors, but also the muscles in the groin and hip. Sit on your bottom with the soles of your feet touching. Grab your feet with your hands while placing your elbows on your knees. Use your elbows to gently press down on the insides of your knees to activate the stretch.



Glute Medius: Often ignored, the Glute Medius or hip muscle is often the culprit when it comes to IT Band issues and/or Runner's Knee. A tight or weak glute medius can cause both conditions. This stretch is more subtle than the other stretches. Gravity does most of the work. Lean your right shoulder against a wall. Cross the right leg behind the left ankle. Then lean into the wall. You should feel a subtle stretch along the outside of the right hip and thigh. Repeat with your left side.

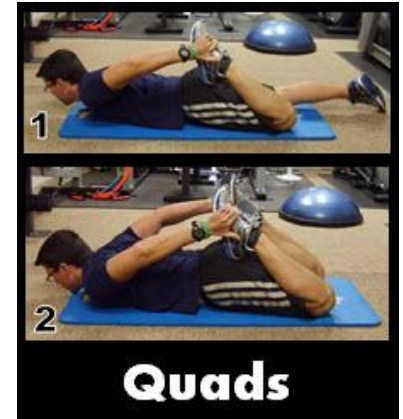


Quads: Overworked and/or tight quads can cause issues such as Patellar tendinitis which causes pain-to-the-touch below the knee.

1. To do this stretch, lie face down on a mat. Reach back with your left hand and grab your left foot. Gently pull your foot toward your buttocks. Repeat with the left side.

Note: This stretch can also be done standing, however, I've discovered a much better stretch when doing this laying down.

2. For a more advanced stretch, grab both feet at the same time pulling both feet toward the buttocks simultaneously.



Hamstrings and Glutes: Tight hamstrings can cause a domino effect of problems. Tight glutes can put more demands on the hamstrings which in turn puts more stress on the calves and so on all the way down to the plantar fascia. Keeping the glutes and hamstrings loose can help prevent a whole host of problems.

1. A better alternative to the traditional toe touch, this stretch has you place one foot on a step, wall, or car bumper. Then position both hands in the fold of the leg. Looking straight ahead, slowly bend forward at the hip while at the same time pulling your toes toward you. This creates a great stretch along the hamstring without stressing on the lower back.

2. The knee hug is great for stretching the glutes. Cross your right knee over your extended left leg. Then hook your left arm around your right knee and gently pull your knee toward your chest. Repeat with the left knee and right arm.

3. This stretch is great for the hamstrings, glutes, and piriformis. Lie on your back. Bend both legs and then cross the right leg over the left knee. Reach through and grab the back of the upper left leg and gently pull it toward you. You'll feel the stretch in the hamstring and glute of the right leg. Repeat the process with the opposite leg.



Stretches

Hip Flexors: These are one of the most overused muscle groups in the body. If you have an office job and sit most of the day, then you're flexing your

hip flexors that entire time. Then go for a run after that? You can see where some problems might arise. Never stretching the hip flexors can result in a slight pelvic tilt putting stress on the lower back and causing a whole host of muscle issues.

1. Bend down on a mat with your left knee bent and your right leg extended behind you. Place your left hand on the inside of your left foot.

Your right hand should be about shoulders-width from the left hand. Gently lean forward. You'll feel a slight stretch of the hamstring in the left leg, but the main purpose of this stretch is to open up and stretch the hip flexor of the right leg. Repeat the process with the left leg extended and the right leg bent.

2. A similar version of this stretch can be done by placing one foot on a wall or car bumper and leaning forward to stretch the opposite leg's hip flexor.



Hamstrings, Hips, Calves, Achilles Tendon:

The following stretch includes everything but the kitchen sink! This stretch will help to stretch the **hamstrings, glutes, hips, calves, and Achilles Tendon**. If you want bang for your buck, this stretch is for you.

To do the stretch, lie on your back with one leg in the air. Place a resistance tube, long towel, yoga strap, or belt around the raised foot. (I'm using a jump rope.) With the knee locked, gently pull the raised leg as far as you can while exhaling. To get even more out of this stretch, try slowly flexing and releasing the foot while the leg is extended.

Note: If you are new to this stretch and need a little more support, try placing the raised leg against a door frame. The flat leg will be laying through the doorway.)



Calves, Achilles Tendon, Plantar Fascia:

Tight lower legs can cause everything from pulled calf muscles, to Achilles Tendinitis, to plantar fasciitis. The following simple stretches can help prevent all of these issues.



- 1.** Place the right foot perpendicular to your body. Extend your left leg out in front of you with your heel on the ground and your knee locked. Put your hands in the fold of your leg and gently bend forward while pulling your toes toward you. Repeat the process with the right leg extended.
- 2.** Place the toe of your left foot and both hands against a wall. Extend your right leg behind you as far back as you can while still keeping the heel on the ground. Repeat the process with the left leg extended.
- 3.** Similar to #2, this stretch stretches the soleus (the deeper calf muscle). This stretch begins like #2, but instead of extending the right leg behind you, put the toe of your right shoe against the heel of the left foot. Then squat down as far as you can. You'll feel the stretch in the area of the Achilles Tendon of the right foot. Repeat the process with the left foot.
- 4.** The plantar fascia is a fibrous band of tissue that runs from the heel of the foot to the ball of the foot. A tight plantar fascia can often result in a sore heel, a sore ball of the foot or soreness anywhere in between. To stretch the plantar fascia, place your toes on the edge of a step. Hold onto a rail or use a broomstick for balance. Gently lower both heels below the horizon of the step. This stretch will also help loosen the Achilles Tendon as well as the calves.

Note: When adding any new physical activity to your routine, first consult with your doctor, especially if you're new to fitness.