

# Warm Up Properly



No exercise session should begin without a warm-up—a few minutes of light activity to get your muscles primed for real exertion. Warming up increases the benefits of exercise and reduces your risk of injury.

And the body does warm up in the true sense of the word—increased activity increases blood flow to the muscles, and the body gradually begins to shift gears from relative inactivity to higher performance.

## The Stretch

Stretching should take 5 to 10 minutes. Always stretch slowly, gently, and gradually. (Don't bounce!) Breathe normally—don't hold your breath when you stretch. And don't stretch to the point of pain or discomfort. Rather, stretch to the point where you can feel some tension, but not pain. If you feel any pain or discomfort, stop immediately.

*To stretch your arms:* Hold one arm straight out from your side, level with the shoulder. Make an arc by raising your arm straight up, then lowering it to your side. Hold your arm out again. Swing it across your chest as far as is comfortable. Swing it toward your back as far as it will comfortably go. Now hold your arm straight out in front of you, bending your elbow in a right angle with the palm toward the floor. Without moving your upper arm, move your forearm straight up and then straight down. Alternate arms.

*To stretch your back:* Stand with your feet spread apart. Clasp your hands high above your head. Lean your head back and look up. Stretch your shoulder muscles as if you were reaching for the sky. Hold for 5 seconds. Relax. Repeat two to four times.

*To stretch your legs:* Stand erect and balance yourself with your hand against a wall or chair. Bend one knee, grasp that ankle, and draw the leg up and back. Hold. Pull your foot gently until you feel tension (not pain) in your upper front thigh. Hold for 5 seconds or longer. Repeat with your other leg.

## The Quick Warm-Up

Spend 5 minutes performing a less intense form of your exercise of choice—like taking a brisk walk before you run. This raises your heart rate slightly and leaves you sweating lightly.

## Follow Up with a Cool-Down

Cooling down is the reverse of warming up, and it helps your body recover from exercise in three ways. A 5-minute cool-down:

- Allows the heart rate to slow down gradually.
- Prevents blood from pooling in the legs.
- Reduces the likelihood that your muscles will feel stiff after exercise because it reduces the buildup of lactic acid.

As with the warm-up, cool down slowly. Perform the activity at a slower pace, and/or stretch (as described in the previous tip).