

Stretching for beginners - Part 1

Photo 1 – introduction

Stretching forms an essential part of any sport or physical activity and never has this been truer for anyone wanting to develop his or her kicking ability.

To become a successful kicker involves building muscles in the leg that are rarely used in everyday activities, and most importantly, increasing their flexibility.

Even the most skilled kicker will require (and probably already have) a good warm-up and stretching routine that they adhere to prior to their workout and anyone that fails to warm up and stretch themselves properly, runs the risk of straining and tearing muscles and ligaments that could result in long term or even permanent damage.

The following routine is the first of a series of effective stretching exercises designed to gradually increase your flexibility and help you to develop and improve your kicking ability.

Before commencing any stretching routine ensure you warm-up correctly to reduce the risk of injury.



First routine

Photo 2 – Stage 1

Stand upright with your feet together and relax as much as possible.



Photo 3 – Touch your toes

Take a deep breath in and, keeping your knees straight, slowly lower yourself from your hips reaching down as far as you can. Ensure you keep both legs straight with the knees locked at all times. Breathe out as you lower your body down and try not to bend the head too far back to avoid putting unnecessary stress on the neck and spine. As a guide, try to touch your feet or toes with your fingertips.



Photo 4 - Side on shot



Photo 5 – Touch the floor

If you can successfully touch your toes with your fingertips, then reach a little lower and attempt to touch the floor keeping your legs straight at all times.



Photo 6 – Palms flat

If you can successfully touch the floor with your fingertips, then reach a little lower still and attempt to place the palms of your hands flat on the floor.



Photo 7 – Palms up

If you can successfully place your palms flat on the floor, turn your palms face up and attempt to place the backs of your hands flat on the floor.

Hold the stretch for a count of 10 seconds and then raise back up slowly.

Stay as relaxed as possible during the stretch and don't forget to breathe.

Repeat twice more



Second routine

Photo 8 – Standing

From a relaxed standing position as before...



Photo 9 – Pulling down

...keep your legs straight and take hold of the backs of your legs with your hands, ideally around the ankle area for maximum leverage. Breathe out and at the same time gently pull yourself down attempting to touch your chest on you legs. The temptation with this stretch is to 'cheat' by arching the back, therefore, ensure you keep your back straight at all times and bend slowly to avoid over balancing.

Hold the stretch for a count of 10 seconds and then raise back up slowly. Stay as relaxed as possible during the stretch and don't forget to breathe. Repeat twice more



Final Routine

Photo 10 – Standing

From a relaxed standing position as before...



Photo 11 – Pulling down

...pull yourself down as you did for the previous exercise and this time hold the stretch for a count of 5 seconds.



Photo 12 – Bend knees

This time bend your knees taking 50 per cent of your body weight on your fingertips. Be sure not to take your knees past 90 degrees so as to avoid placing unnecessary strain on the knee joints. Hold that position for a count of 5 seconds.



Photo 13 – Straighten up

From the bent position, keep your fingertips on the floor and straighten your legs once again. Increase the stretch by taking hold of the backs of your legs (around the ankle area) and use your arms as leverage to pull your chest closer to your knees. Once again be sure to keep the back straight throughout this exercise.

Repeat this final routine ten times by pulling down, bending your knees and straightening back up again to gain maximum benefit from this stretching routine. Don't forget to breathe.



Final word

While the stretching exercises used in this programme are proven to increase your flexibility, you will gain maximum benefit and experience quicker results if you stretch regularly (at least three times a week) and use the holding technique (take the stretch to its maximum limit and increase the pressure gently), rather than 'bouncing' with these exercises.