Core Flexibility

Static and Dynamic Stretches for the Core

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Figure 1. Forward Walk (first leg over)

Figure 2. Forward Walk (second leg over)

Core training is the hot new trend that we hear throughout the industry. Many coaches, trainers, and athletes have implemented some type of core training exercise(s) to their programs to improve performance. These exercises train the large muscles in the center of the body (abdominals, obliques, and spinal erectors) that make up the core. These muscles and many other smaller stabilizer muscles are responsible for stabilizing and balancing the body. However, little has been conveyed to athletes on how to implement a dynamic stretching routine for the core into their programs.

Common Core Injuries

By implementing a dynamic stretching routine into your program, you will decrease your risk of injuries to the core area of the body. Many injuries, such as abdominal strains, hip flexor/abductor strains, groin strains, and lower back issues may be prevented from occurring or reoccurring with a proper core flexibility program. Many of these injuries require extended time to heal due to the nature of where they are located and what major responsibilities they play in athletic performance.

Dynamic Stretches

These stretches should be performed after an adequate warm up. Many of these stretches will be performed with track hurdles (about 6 – 8). However, if one does not have access to this type of equipment, they can improvise by going over imaginary hurdles. The basis of these stretches is core flexibility, specifically in the hips, and this can be accomplished with or without hurdles.

Good Mornings

This is a dynamic stretch that can be done proceeding static stretches. You should perform about 5 – 10 repetitions of this stretch. The goal of this stretch is to keep the hands locked behind the head, knees slightly bent, and to finish standing tall after each repetition. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your hands locked behind the head. Then bend over at the waist attempting to bend over as far as possible. Keep the back flat, the chest up, and the weight on the heels. Come back up into a standing position. This is a great stretch to loosen up the lower back.

Forward Walk (Figures 1 and 2)

The goal to have a "pop" in your step and to be athletic, balanced, and to try not touch the hurdle. Go over the hurdles with the right leg first, then again with the left leg first.

Lateral Lunge

For this drill the odd number hurdles (1, 3, & 5) should be set at the lowest height allowed. Go through the hurdles first to the right then repeat the whole drill going to the left. To perform, step over the first hurdle one leg at a time while facing side ways (figure 3). After clearing the first hurdle, duck underneath the second hurdle to the right (figure 4), then come back under the hurdle to the left (figure 5). Complete the first set of hurdles by coming back up under the second hurdle to the right again, finishing in a standing position (figure 6). Proceed through the next two hurdles in the same manner (over the first, under the second to the right, left, and then right again). Repeating the movement on the final two hurdles.

Figure 3. Lateral Lunge (over the first hurdle)

Static Stretches

While there are many different types of static stretches that are out there for the core of the body, we will focus on a select few that should help loosen up the core muscle groups. Each stretch should be held for 20 – 30 seconds. They should not be performed to the point of pain or injury. These stretches should be performed after a complete warm up and the above mentioned dynamic stretches.

Figure 4. Lateral Lunge (under the second hurdle)

Figure 5. Lateral Lunge (back under the second hurdle)

Modified Hurdler's Stretch

This is probably one of the most common stretches. From a seated position, place the bottom of one foot on the inside of the opposite thigh. The opposite leg should be stretched straight ahead. Facing the straight leg, bend forward at the waist, bringing the chest toward the knee. Hold the stretch. Repeat the stretch for the opposite leg.

Quad Pull

This is another common stretch that most people should be familiar with. This is done standing on one leg, grabbing the opposite leg/foot, and pulling the foot back toward the butt. Keep the knee of the stretching leg close to the knee of the support leg. Stand tall to feel a stretch in the quadriceps. After stretching one side, switch legs and stretch the other side. In order to make this stretch more difficult, you can attempt to keep your balance while attempting to touch your

hand to the foot on the floor. This helps to work on balance and coordination. This is a great stretch for the quadriceps and hip flexors.

Squatting Hip Adductor Stretch

While keeping both feet flat, squat down keeping the knees behind the toes and both feet flat on the ground. Once squatting, push the knees out away from the hips with the elbows. The elbows should push on the inside of the knee and not rest on top of the knee or leg.

The goal of this stretch is to push the knees out as far as possible, while keeping the feet flat. This is a great stretch for the groin, gluteals, and lower back.

Conclusion

Adopting these core flexibility exercises into your routine is a great way to help decrease your risk of injury. The core flexibility program is an easy way to implement something beneficial into your program that only takes a few minutes. It can be applied to any athlete's current warm up routine. ▲

About the Author

Travis brown is currently the Head Strength and Conditioning coach for USA Gym in Marietta, GA, working with young to elite, professional athletes. He earned his BS in Exercise Physiology and MS in Recreation Administration at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN, where he played football for the 1998 National Championship team, and continued working in the weight room with various men's athletic teams.

Figure 6. Lateral Lunge (first set of hurdles completed)