

The Warm Up

Some tips to help you prepare for the big race

Written by Susie Power

Many years ago I was coming off a five-month layoff where I ran very little. I went along to help promote a fun-run for my sponsor and at the last minute decided I'd have a 'jog' with the main pack, but typical of my 'lack of patience' personality, I couldn't help but begin to catch and pass runners ahead of me. I gradually increased the pace throughout the 10km race and ended up finishing in the top ten. Pleased with my efforts, it motivated me to get back into training and aim for the next race BUT the next race wasn't to be. For the next three days I could hardly walk a step and it probably took me another week to get back into some light jogging all because I didn't warm up!

In my experience, I've seen some people jog around too fast before their race, while some just run too far. I have also heard a classic comment before one big fun-run, where a spectator asked his partner "Why are they running so much before their race? Won't they get tired?" Yes, this is a valid point and one that must not be thrown out as a silly remark. That 'jogging around' before a race is a fine line between a good or bad performance. If you warm up properly, your body will be primed to compete but if you abuse the warm up you will only hamper your performance and open the risk of injury.

The reasons for warming up are pretty straightforward. It gets our body, including the joints, muscles and tendons, ready for the stress that lies ahead, whether that is a training session or competition. The general warm up should always involve the whole body. It increases the circulation and the core body temperature. I always remember asking one of my coaches "for how long and how fast should I warm up?" His response was simply "jog easy until you begin to show sweat on your brow". It made me laugh.

There are many levels and different ways to warm up. The beginner may find they only need to walk to raise their heart rate to 50% of the maximum that is required. The regular but not so serious athlete may only need a short jog compared with the elite athletes or more experienced runners who tend to run for about twenty minutes at what seems to be a fast pace. The one thing all have in common however is that each of their warm up routines will slightly change in accordance with the weather.



Philo Saunders demonstrating a glut stretch.

Naturally on a hot or humid day one should limit the cardio aspect of their warm up and spend a little more time on stretching the muscles. When the weather turns to those cold winter days, our bodies need a little more time to warm up and a little more cardio work to help pump the blood through to the muscles. There is no magic length of time or distance that must be covered in the warm up. A lot goes on a combination of personal comfort and fitness. I went on a warm up with one athlete down at the local club the other night and while trying to 'hang on' during his standard 4km warm up, I glanced down at my heart rate noting I was running at about 70% of my max and he was puffing and panting at a similar rate. Sure, we were still able to have a conversation but a warm up that quick takes the sharpness out of the track session that was next on the agenda which, in turn, lengthens the recovery and potentially causes tiredness and even injury. So, it is important to run your warm up at YOUR own easy pace.

Here are some examples of a simple warm up:

Warm Up schedule for the Advanced (experienced runner who generally runs 100+km per week)

1. 15-20 minutes (3-4Km) of easy jogging. Usually conducted wearing a tracksuit top and pants and training shoes.
2. 10-15 minutes of FULL BODY stretches:
Arms/triceps
Waist/hips
Buttocks/hip flexors
Quadriceps/hamstrings
Calves/Achilles

3. 3-5 light stride outs. Working up similar to 'race pace'. Strides should be no longer than 80-90m but some elites structure a couple of 200m stride outs to get the body more used to running at race pace and sustaining that heart rate for that bit little longer. Changing into your racing 'flats' you will begin to feel light and ready to race.

Warm Up schedule for the Intermediate (regular runner who runs between 40-100km per week)

1. 10-15 minutes (2-3km) of easy jogging. Usually conducted wearing a tracksuit top and pants and training shoes.
2. 10-15 minutes of FULL BODY stretches as above.
3. 2-3 easy strides about 60-80m. Concentrating on running similar to 'race pace' without stressing your body. This is your time to work on 'opening your stride', thinking of your technique and getting your body used to the fact it is going to race in a few minutes. If you have racing shoes it is best to change into them now, but if you haven't its okay. These strides will help you feel more bouncy and light before your race hit out.

Warm Up schedule for the Beginner (relatively new to running and likes the idea of racing)

1. 10-15 minutes of walking but breaking into a light jog for about 5 minutes toward the end. It's still important to warm up your muscles with movement, so even walking is fine. If you intend jogging in the race, it is important to get yourself used to a light jog in the warm up. Even if you aim to cover a kilometer you will benefit from it in the race. The best example is: park the car and walk to the race start and 'hurry up' and get there!

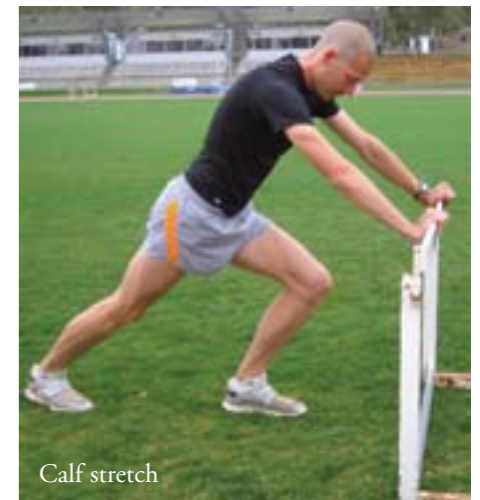
2. Spend about 15 minutes on FULL BODY stretches. Concentrate on your upper body stretching out your arms, back, waist and work down to your legs. Find yourself a bench and stretch your buttocks, hamstrings, quadriceps, and calves and don't forget the weakest point – the achilles.

3. Lightly jog/walk over to the start and enjoy your race.

So remember, we warm up for the sole reason to pump blood through to the muscles. A nice easy slow jog will also prepare you mentally for either your workout or your race. The general guide for the length of your warm up should be dictated more by your body rather than time or distance. If you are really dedicated you won't wear a watch and will simply jog around until your body begins to sweat.

Always stretch AFTER your jogging as you will get more benefit from warm and supple muscles.

As warming up is the very first stage of any physical activity, it is also important to repeat the motions as we 'wind down' from our session or competition. In what my friend, Carl, describes as 'the worst part of training', the 'warm down' is another important aspect to reduce injury. A simple slow jog/walk after your race enables the muscles to cool themselves down. If the cool down isn't completed you risk 'pooling' of the blood in the muscles which leads to an extremely stiff and sore feeling in the following days and, believe me, when you get up in the morning walking on your heels and leaning forward with a lot of groaning, it makes everything from going to the toilet to sitting down at a desk uncomfortable and going for a run will probably be the furthest thing from your mind! Complete your warm up and cool down the right way and you will be successful in both your race and your recovery. Good Luck!



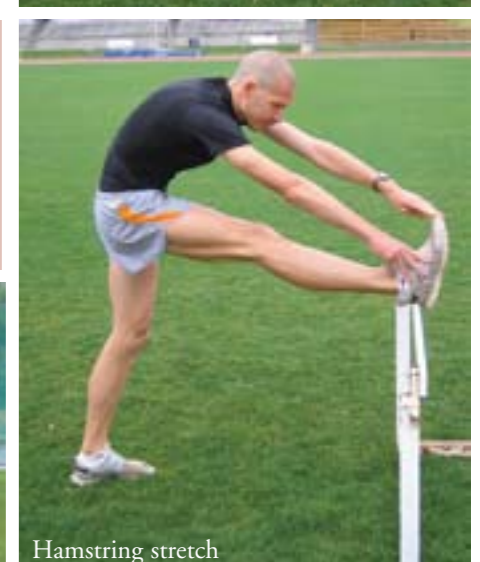
Calf stretch



Groin stretch

Basic Structure of the Warm Up:

1. From 5 to 20minutes of easy cardio exercise.
2. A light walk around and 5-20minutes of stretching exercises involving all the muscle groups generally starting from head to feet.



Hamstring stretch



Quadricep stretch



Hip flexor stretch