

Warming Up & Cooling Down

What you do immediately before and after a run is just as important as the workout itself. Are you adequately preparing your body for the demands of exercise, and are you allowing your system to recover appropriately after the work is finished? As many runners know, things don't really start to "click" until at least a half-mile into your run. This is because most of the sport-specific warm-up happens during the first few minutes of a light jog before the "real" workout begins. Taking a few minutes to focus on your ball-in-socket joints (hips and shoulders), as well as ankle and knee flexion, before the run will help you "hit your stride" sooner. Then, a good post-run cool down is just as much preparation for your next workout as it is recovery from the one you just completed.

The rule of thumb is to perform a dynamic (movement-based) warm-up before running, and save the passive (static) stretching for post-workout. When you think about it, it makes sense...leg swings, high knees and butt kicks are all opening your joints, promoting blood flow and conditioning your body for the running motion. Once you don't need to run anymore, it is the appropriate time to focus on increasing your range of motion and flexibility. You can use common stretches like toe touches and a standing quadriceps stretch or yoga poses like cobra and downward-facing dog.

Myofascial release is one of my favorite warm-up AND cool-down methods. You can use a [stick roller like Addaday](#) or a [Trigger Point foam roller](#) before a run to promote blood flow and release unnecessary tension in the muscles. Post-run self-massage is also a great method to help break up any knots and move metabolic waste out of your system. A post-run walk is especially helpful for relaxing everything after a tough workout. For added benefit, try walking backwards for a few minutes to "unwind" your system.

A dynamic warm-up should take no more than 7-10 minutes, and is helpful in both preventing injury and maximizing the benefits of your run. When you are performing your static stretches, you should lengthen the muscle to a point where you are slightly uncomfortable, but not in pain. Holding each stretch for 10-20 seconds will help minimize your risk of getting hurt, while holding it for longer than 20 seconds will increase your range of motion and flexibility. Unfortunately, many runners skip out on the warm-up and the cool-down for the sake of extra mileage or due to a tight schedule. I'll be the first to admit I'm often one of them! Taking an extra few minutes to book-end your run with the appropriate performance-enhancing practices will allow you to get more out of the day's workout and feel more refreshed for tomorrow's adventure.