

STRETCHING

Most of us are familiar with static stretches, where a stretch position is held for 20-30 seconds. This type of stretch is good after running, but is not recommended before running. Static stretching temporarily weakens the muscle, which is not good if you're about to race! It also increases the risk of injury, because the stretched muscles give less support to the joints.

A better alternative before running is active stretching, also known as mobilization exercises. This is a repeated movement through the full range of motion, but without holding the stretch: for example, stepping over hurdles. Mobilization exercises should always be done after a warm up.

After racing or a hard training session, you should only hold static stretches for about 8-10 seconds. Hard running produces micro-tears in your muscles, and a long stretch may cause further damage. A short stretch helps to realign the muscle fibres and can also reduce soreness.

The ideal time for a long static stretch is after an easy run, when your muscles are warm but not stressed. You should always stretch the hamstrings, quads, calves and gluteals after an easy run.

If you have the time, a separate stretching session once or twice a week is very beneficial. A Pilates or yoga class provides an enjoyable way to include stretching in your schedule.