

This resource is intended for senior athletes who exercise regularly and may not be appropriate for all older adults. Talk to your physician or physical therapist if you're interested in starting an exercise program.

Flexibility Training for Athletes Over 50

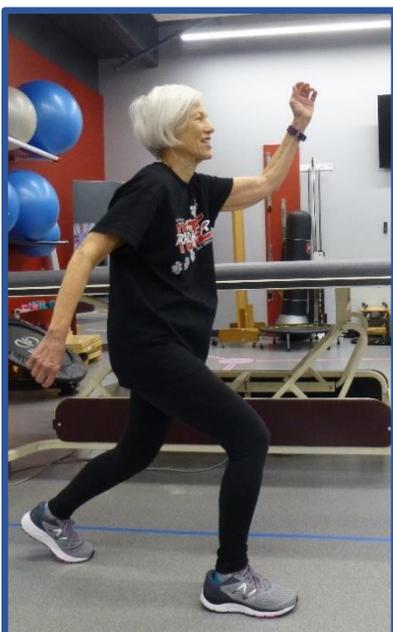
Flexibility comes from tissue in our joints, tendons, ligaments and muscles. This tissue can allow impressive amounts of tension, compression and torsion without tearing or injury. Good tissue flexibility can help to prevent injuries. Beyond that, it can allow senior athletes to be better able to 'wind up' for a pitch, stoop down for a ball, stride past the competition or outreach the other team. Better ankle flexibility is even associated with a lower risk of falling.

How does flexibility change with aging?

As we age, the tissues that allow flexibility become less hydrated and less pliable. Joints, tendons, ligaments and muscles become more stiff. Senior athletes have been shown to maintain better flexibility than the average older adult, though losses still occur with age.

What can I do to be more flexible?

Flexibility is a great example of 'use it or lose it'. The more you use a motion or move in a certain way, the easier that movement will become. Your body's ability to adapt to new movements, reach higher, and stretch further is still there. It just takes a bit more attention and time than it used to. A warm-up with dynamic stretching is a useful means of improving flexibility and decreasing the risk of injury before competition and may enhance your performance. Static stretching after a workout or warm up can help you to gain even more mobility and may make your next workout or competition even better.



WARM UP – Dynamic Stretching

LUNGE WALKING

- Take a walk with exaggerated lunge steps and big arm movements. Walk for at least a minute or 20-30 steps.
- Start small and as you begin to warm up, make your movement bigger.
- Repeat this with high knees.
- Be creative! Create a dynamic warm up that mimics the movements you'll make during your specific sport.

Static Stretching

Static stretching will improve your flexibility, but it's best after exercise or following a good warm up when your tissues have plenty of blood flow and are less likely to be injured. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends at least 10 minutes of stretching, twice weekly for older adults. Consider some of the following exercises as a way to improve your flexibility. Remember ***stretching should not hurt***. You should feel tension, not pain.



STANDING QUAD STRETCH

Stand behind a chair for balance. Place one foot behind you on a sturdy chair or other surface. Stand tall and feel the stretch in the front of your thigh.

For a greater stretch

- Bend your opposite knee
- Tighten your buttocks

Hold 30-60 seconds at least twice on each side.

STANDING CALF STRETCH

Stand at a wall and place one foot behind you. With your knee straight and your toes pointed at the wall feel the stretch in the back of your calf.

Hold 30-60 seconds at least twice on each side.



To receive an exercise program specifically for you, find a local physical therapist.

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