

Why Warm Up, Cool Down and Stretch?

You can help prevent injury and reduce muscle soreness if you warm up before and cool down after physical activity. Warming-up prepares your muscles and heart for activity. Cooling-down slows your heart rate gradually and helps prepare your muscles for the next time you're active.



Warm-ups take 5 to 15 minutes.

1. Do your planned activity, such as walking, but at a lower intensity (slower pace) for a brief time. This may mean walking slowly for a few minutes before speeding up.
2. Do a few minutes of gentle stretching if you plan to do something more vigorous than walking.

Cool-downs take 5 to 15 minutes.

1. To cool down, continue your activity, but slow down the pace for a brief time to slow your heart rate.
2. Stretch all major muscle groups used during the activity. Stretching the muscles while they are warm will help increase flexibility.



Stretch:

Stretching is important for a good warm-up and cool-down and is one of the best ways to prevent and avoid muscle soreness, cramps, and injury.

Here are some helpful tips for proper stretching:

- Do a short warm-up before stretching, such as walking or marching in place. Stretching is more beneficial when your muscles are warm.
- Stretch in both directions (i.e., if you stretch to the left, don't forget to stretch to the right).
- Avoid fast, jerky movements. Stretch slowly and smoothly.
- Stretches should not be painful. Gentle stretching is best. When you repeat the stretch, you should be able to stretch a little further without pain.
- Hold each stretch for 15-60 seconds. Do not bounce.
- Repeat each stretch 4 or more times.
- Breathe slowly in and out. Do not hold your breath.
- Relax, enjoy, and feel good about yourself.
- Stretch often, if possible every day.



Important: Never stretch if you have severe pain.

If a stretch causes pain, stop doing it, or do it more gently. Listen to your body. Sample stretches are available from your MOVE!® team.