

The Warm-up

Warming up and stretching should be a part of every athletic activity, practise as well as competition. A proper warm up will take 10 to 20 minutes and the time needs to be structured into the event or session planning. (Senior athletes can take an hour or more in their warm up and event preparation.)



First, have the children jog easily for 3 to 10 minutes (depending on age and time available). Make sure it is an easy jog – youngsters tend to turn this into a race that defeats the purpose of pre-race preparation. Walking is better than running too fast – you don't want the athletes to be puffing at any stage. Purpose is to raise the body temperature slightly and warm up the muscles (including the heart, which of course, is a muscle.)

There is considerable debate on the value or otherwise of static stretches prior to activity. Preferred routine by most authorities including the IAAF is active stretches or activities as part of the warm up with static stretches as part of the warm down. Start stretching immediately the warm up jog is completed – the benefit of a warm up can be lost within 2 minutes, so don't let the children stand around before starting their activities. If it's cool they should put on or keep on their tracksuit or sweater.

Active Stretches for Warm Up.

Examples of activities that can be incorporated into a pre-competition or training active stretch routine. Start with easier activities and increase the intensity as you go

- Skips – gentle, fast and for height.

- Sideways runs, both to left and right.

- Bouncing up on down on the spot using the ankles.

- Leg swings, both side to side and forward-back.

- Fast but relaxed 20 to 30m stride out sprints.

- Sprint technique drills (high knee walk, high knee run, butt kicks).

- Push ups (particularly for throwers).

- Running over mini hurdles.

- Arm drives. (Arm running action while the athlete is standing still making sure effort drives arm back, not forward, and arm kept close to 90 degree angle at elbow with pivot at shoulder, not elbow.

- Arm windmills.

- Games such as soccer or touch football to add variety.

- You can even devise a warm up routine and do to music.

Whatever you do, try to make it fun, make it varied and make as much of the activities specific to the event to be done (i.e. emphasise

running activities prior to running races, skips and bounds before jumping etc.) A fun way to warm up is play "snake" or follow the leader – the group lines up single file behind the leader who does series of warm up type activities on the run with everyone else copying as they run behind like a "big snake". Activities are limited only by the imagination of the leader and the teacher. Children take turns in being leader. Basically, any activity that prepares the muscles for what is ahead, warms the children up and is fun is a functional routine.

Static Stretches for Warm Down.

Stretches should be held for at least 15 seconds (ideally longer) and each stretch performed 3 times.

The following stretches are from George Blough Dintiman from his book "Speed Improvement for Young Athletes" (National Association of Speed and Explosion, 2002).

Neck: bend forward at waist with hands on knees and gently roll head. (Important – gently!)

Hamstring: stand with knees slightly bent and bend over to touch ground or as far as possible. Hold to 30 seconds.

Quads: stand on right leg, holding left ankle with right hand. Try to straighten right leg (as opposed to pulling leg up with hand.)

Calf: stand about 50cm from a wall or fence and lean forward with the front leg bent. Move hips forward keeping heel on ground until stretch is felt in calf.

Achilles: Stand as for calf, but have both legs bent. Keep both heels on the ground and lean forward to stretch lower part of leg.

The following stretches are from Brian McDonald, a noted British coach.

Biceps: Stand tall, feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Hold arms out to the side parallel with the ground and the palms of the hand facing forward. Rotate the hands so the palms face to the rear. Stretch the arms back as far as possible. You should feel the stretch across your chest and in the biceps

Upper Back: Stand tall, feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Interlock fingers and push hands as far away from chest as possible, allowing upper back to relax. Stretch should be felt between shoulder blades.

Shoulder: Stand tall, feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Place right arm, parallel with the ground across the front of your chest. Bend the left arm up and use the left forearm to ease the right arm closer to you chest . Stretch should be felt in the shoulder

Shoulder and Triceps: Stand tall, feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Place both hands above head and then slide both hands down the middle of spine. Stretch is felt in shoulders and the triceps

Adductor: Stand tall with you feet approximately two shoulder widths apart. Bend the right leg and lower the body. Keep you back straight and use the arms to balance. The stretch is felt in the left leg adductor.