



Stretching for Runners - the Big Five

by Coach Roy Benson

This article by Coach Benson is from the guidebook this is included in Coach Benson's Training Plan by PC Coach. For more information on [Coach Benson's Heart Rate Running Software](#), [click here](#).

There is a balance between strength, endurance, and flexibility. One way stretching benefits your running is through improved flexibility: your stride length increases allowing you to run faster with no additional energy. These five stretches are a modest recommendation from an old coach who understands the need for balance. These stretches take only a few minutes and may lead to better health, speed and good looks while sprinting for the finish line. If you diligently perform these essential stretching exercises, you will notice that running becomes a little easier. You may even be surprised at the speed that lurks in your legs.

Here are **Coach Benson's Big Five Stretches** –

These exercises will help minimize the ravages of running. They're designed to work on the major muscles involved in the art of distance running.

Before you start, consider this advice from a 40 year veteran of competitive running:

- Avoid stretching cold muscles. When muscles are cold, it's easier to tear the muscle fibers that you are desperately trying to protect.
- Walk or jog 5 minutes to get blood to the area, wear sweat pants or tights and try to stretch where it's warm.
- Always stretch to the point of discomfort, not pain.
- Breathe comfortably and let the muscle group relax. As it relaxes, it will stretch.
- Hold each stretch for 30 to 45 seconds.



Splits

This stretch will help to stretch your adductors. When tight, this muscle group - on the inside of your thighs - often causes straining of the iliotibial band (IT band) on the outside of your leg.

Set your feet parallel and spread them as far apart as possible. Fold your arms at the elbows, and bend forward while trying to reach the ground with your folded arms.

Hang Ten



To avoid shortening both your stride and your career, the Hang Ten stretches your hamstrings – the most vital muscle group involved in running.

This stretch will also loosen your lower back muscles. To perform this stretch, bend over at the waist and hang your fingers toward your toes, relaxing your neck muscles and letting your head hang.



Lunge

This stretch has a two-fold design. It will loosen both your hip flexors and your groin muscles – muscle groups that are vital to fast and uphill running.

Hip flexors are stretched by keeping the toe of the trailing leg pointed straight down as you drop your knee to the ground. (See photo 1 below). Groin

muscles are stretched by rolling your foot over so that the inside edge is flat against the ground (see photo 2 below).

Photo 1:
Lunge Foot
Position for
Hip Flexor
Stretch



Photo 2:
Lunge Foot
Position for
Groin
Stretch



Flamingo



Tight quadriceps will decrease your back kick and shorten your stride. By stretching the quads, you help the hamstrings pick up your heels as you toe off.

Balance on one foot or hold onto a nearby object and keep your knee pointed down with your torso perpendicular to the ground. If you keep your grip at the toes, you will also stretch your shin muscles.

Heel Drop

Loose calf muscles will help prevent Achilles tendonitis and take some of the burden away from your shins as you bring your trailing leg forward when running.

Stand on a curb or step and drop your heels just to the point of discomfort and relax your calves. Your heels will move closer to the ground as your calves stretch. Your calves, Achilles tendon and shins will thank you for this stretch.

