



Stretching!

There has been a lot of debate on stretching over the years. There are lots of opinions on the how, when, why and even the benefits of stretching. Added to that, there is a school of thought that claims that stretching may actually put you at risk of injury! So first, let's discuss the chance of injury.

I've heard it said that stretching muscles while they are cold puts the muscles, tendons and ligaments in a compromised position. Since I have not seen evidence in either direction, I suggest relying on common sense. Before a run, when you're not warmed up, stretch only to the point where you feel the initial pull. Don't go deeply into any stretches until the area is well warmed.

We approach stretching with active isolated (AI) stretches. These are stretches that include a range of motion to warm the area as you stretch it. This will promote blood and warmth to the area and make the area more receptive to the motion.

There is also a perspective that injury can occur when a joint is moved beyond its normal range of motion during the stretch. However, if we gradually stretch and strengthen areas within a normal range of motion, this will actually protect us from such risk.

Post-run stretching can be very effective because the muscles are warm and limber. This is the time to go deeper into the stretches.

So how should we stretch? Only stretch to the point of the pull when cold. When warm, you can go deeper but always be careful. Like any form of exercise, if you take it too far you are risking injury.

Although science hasn't proven that stretching has specific rewards to your performance, or that it can prevent injury, one thing that stretching can provide is an opportunity to focus your mind on the run to come, or reflect on your accomplishment.

Use this time to prepare. Get yourself mentally ready for that 20 miler, the run to the corner, the interval work or that hill. Picture yourself flying along and doing your best. Focus on the positive and don't let your negative thoughts about the run come in. Forget your day at work and your responsibilities.

By treating your time spent stretching as "your" time, your workout will be even more rewarding.

RUN!
Benny