

Flexibility Considerations: Dynamic Stretching

By Joe Giandonato, MS

Maybe you wish you had a hotter girlfriend, or if you are one of the few ugly bastards lucky enough to have a hot girlfriend, like me, you wish they would stop watching *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* every Monday night! If you're one of the guys who is: a) willing to spend quality time with his girlfriend over an hour of garbage cable TV, like me, or b) is pawing off their balls and their Monday night workouts, so you have the time to accompany your demanding girlfriend to watch the show in order well...to keep her around, you wish that the cast was hotter. Sorry if I've offended anyone's preferences in women here, I just don't find women with tanned, leathery skin who require 100g of Botox per week that attractive. Anyways, we can't always get what we wish for. I'm sure at one point or another, you've wished for a briefer or far more effective warm-up, while you endured endless static and ballistic stretches before your practice, game, or workout – but, at least you're not one of Coach Jeff Kearin's players. Many of them suffered rhabdomyolysis and heat exhaustion after being locked in a sauna of a wrestling room while they worked out. Perhaps Coach Kearin is a proponent of static and ballistic stretching, too. He seems like a guy who is trapped in that old-school mentality that 'more is better' and you have to be 'broken down before you get built back up'. We know as educated fitness professionals, that these mantras don't apply to improving athletic performance. Yes, they may develop mental toughness, but running a football practice as if it were a prison camp will definitely wear down your players physiologically, thereby impeding performance and in the case of Coach Kearin, potentially risking their lives.

Hopefully, none of you readers have endured anything that extreme, but I'm certain that you've done some pretty senseless stuff in preparation for a workout or practice under the supervision of a careless or inexperienced teacher, coach, or trainer. Endless running, 30-minute stretching sessions, Jane Fonda-type callisthenic garbage, you know the deal.

So what is dynamic stretching, and how is it different from the other forms of stretching that were previously discussed?

Whenever you see the word dynamic anywhere, it usually means something good. Often times, you may think of dynamic as 'change' or 'movement'. And that is exactly what dynamic stretching is. During the execution of static stretches, movement is minimal. Despite movement occurring in ballistic stretches, the stretch reflex is evoked, thereby negating any movement as functional. In dynamic stretching, the muscle is not relaxed during the stretch, it is usually moving, through a full range of motion, which makes it more applicable in both sport and physical activity. Essentially, you are mimicking the movements that will ultimately take place in the weight room or on the field, thus emphasizing the principle of specificity. As mentioned before, the terms 'dynamic stretching' and 'ballistic stretching' sometimes mistakenly become interchangeable. Coaches, trainers, athletes, kinesiology students, whose temporal lobes are one more acronym away from exploding, are all guilty of this. Don't feel bad, just know why and when to implement dynamic stretching in your warm-ups.

So why should we perform dynamic stretches?

As I mentioned before, dynamic stretches have more specificity than other forms of stretching. They have more carryover in both sport and daily activities. Never do you perform anything useful in isolation: changing the channel on your remote (if Housewives isn't on), triceps kickbacks, and 20 oz. curls. Okay, drinking beer is requires less movement than throwing back a shot of whiskey or vodka, and besides, if you care about soft tissue quality, you would never consider drinking alcohol, right? So why should stretches be performed in isolation?

A study consisting golfers conducted by researchers at the School of Health and Human Performance at Dublin City University (Ireland), assessed the differences of dynamic stretching and static stretching on swing performance. The study found that dynamic stretching produced much higher club head speeds and subsequent ball speeds (1). Additionally, the study noted that the group who performed dynamic stretching had straighter swing-paths. Maybe this is exactly what Tiger Woods needs to overcome his slump!

Across the Irish Sea, researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University (United Kingdom) noted that performing dynamic warm-ups produce superior sprint and jump performances compared to a warm-ups consisting of static stretching (2).

One should consider the benefits of performing dynamic stretches prior to their workouts, to activate muscles that will be used during the workouts, or in an attempt to improve conditions, i.e. lower back pain via hip mobility exercises. Dynamic stretches, in conjunction with PNF stretching and appropriate static stretching, will help restore flexibility, thus improving performance and perhaps one's quality of life.

Until next time...

References

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About the author

Joe Giandonato is a Philadelphia-area healthcare professional and personal trainer, he holds an M.S. in Exercise Physiology and has nearly a decade of personal training experience. Presently, he trains clients at Broad Street Fitness in Philadelphia, PA. Joe wishes a speedy recovery and a great season to all of the players at McMinnville High School.