

Soccer Stretching Exercises

(Adapted from About.com Sports Medicine)



Standing Quad Stretch

The quadriceps make up a group of muscles along the front of the thigh. These muscles are the powerful muscles used in sprinting and kicking and often prone to fatigue and cramping.

How to perform:

- Stand on one leg (grab onto something solid if you need support).
- Bend your knee and bring your heel toward your buttock.
- Reach for your ankle with your hand.
- Stand up straight and feel a slight pull along the front of your thigh and hip.
- Hold the stretch for 20-30 seconds, release and repeat on the other leg.
- Be careful not to strain your knee - the goal is not to touch your heel to the buttock, but rather to stretch the thigh.



Standing Calf Stretch

The calf, muscle runs along the back of your lower leg and in constant use while running the soccer field.

How to perform:

- Stand about an arm's-length from the wall.
- Lean forward and place both hands on the wall about shoulder width apart.
- Extend one foot (the side to be stretched) behind you with heel on the ground and one foot closer to the wall.
- Lean into wall with your hips until you feel a stretch in the calf of the extended leg.

- Hold this stretch for about 30 seconds and change sides.



Seated Groin and Inner Thigh Stretch

The butterfly stretch stretches the groin and inner thigh. This is a great stretch for athletes who play field or court sports, runners, and anyone who has tight hips or a history of groin injuries. Use this stretch after a thorough warm up to avoid overstretching a cold muscle.

How to perform:

- Sit on the ground, bend your knees, and bring the soles of the feet together.
- Hold your feet with your hands and rest your elbows on your knees.
- Keep your back straight and allow your knees to fall towards the ground.
- You can apply gentle pressure on the inner thigh by pressing gently on the knees with the elbows.
- Hold the stretch for 20 to 30 seconds. Release and repeat three times.



Iliotibial Band Stretch

The iliotibial (IT) band is a tough group of fibers that run along the outside of the thigh that stabilizes the joints. It may become irritated from overuse or tightness.

How to perform:

- Stand with your left leg crossed in front of your right leg.
- Extend your right arm over your head, reaching to the left.
- Put your left hand on your hip.
- Push slightly on your left hip to move your hips to the right; you will feel a slight stretch along the right side of your torso.

- Continue to stretch so you feel a complete stretch on the outer torso, hip, upper thigh and knee of your right leg.
- Hold 20 to 30 seconds and change sides.



Hip Flexors and Psoas Stretch

The hip flexors are a group of muscles that bring the legs up toward the trunk and help generate a powerful soccer kick.

How to perform:

- Begin in a forward lunge position and drop your back knee to the floor.
- Place both hands on your front thigh.
- Press your hips forward and down toward the floor and feel a stretch through your torso, hip, groin and thigh.
- Hold the stretch for about 20-30 seconds, release and repeat on the other leg.



Hips and Lower Back Stretch

This simple stretch opens the hips as it stretches the muscles of the hips, groin and lower back.

How to perform:

- Begin in a forward lunge position and drop your left knee to the ground.
- Place your right elbow on the inside of your right knee as pictured.
- Press your right elbow gently into your right knee and twist your torso to the left.
- Reach your left arm behind you until you feel a gentle stretch in your lower back and right groin.
- Hold the stretch for about 20-30 seconds, release and repeat on the other leg.



Lying Piriformis Stretch

The piriformis muscle is a deep muscle located beneath the gluteal (butt) muscles. This muscle is important for athletes who participate in running sports that require sudden changes of direction.

How to perform:

- Lay down on the floor on your back.
- Cross the right leg over the left, with the right ankle resting on the left knee.
- Pull your left knee to your chest, breathe slowly and deeply from your belly.
- You should feel a deep stretch in your glutes (buttock) and hip.
- Hold 20 to 30 seconds, and repeat on the other side.



Simple Shoulder Stretch

This basic shoulder stretch can help open the chest and loosen tight shoulders.

How to perform:

- Stand up straight with shoulders relaxed and back.
- Reach your right arm up over your head, bend your elbow and reach your hand behind your neck.
- With your elbow pointing up to the sky, slide your right palm down to your back.
- With your left hand, grip your right elbow and gently pull it toward your ear.
- Continue sliding your right palm down your back without straining.
- Hold for 10-20 seconds and release. Repeat with opposite arm.



Seated Hamstring Stretch

The hamstrings need to be strong and loose to endure the demands of running and kicking. This stretch can help maintain length in the hamstrings.

How to perform:

- Sit on the floor with your legs stretched out in front of you with knees straight.
- In a slow, steady movement, lean forward at the hips, keep your knees straight and slide your hands up your legs to your feet.
- Extend as far as you can, and curl your feet toward you to increase the stretch.
- Hold the stretch for 20-30 seconds, release and repeat two to three times.



Achilles Tendon Heel Stretch

The Achilles tendon may be prone to injury if tight, weak or fatigued. Use this stretch to keep it loose.

How to perform:

- Stand about an arm's-length from a wall or another sturdy object.
- Lean forward and place both hands on the wall about shoulder width apart.
- Extend one foot behind you with your knee bent and heel on the ground.
- Keep the other foot close to the wall.
- Bend the knee of the heel to be stretched (keeping the heel down) until you feel a stretch in the back of the lower leg (just above the heel).
- Sink down slowly with your hips to deepen the stretch.
- Hold this stretch for about 30 seconds and change sides.
- This stretch is similar to the calf stretch, however by bending your knee you focus the stretch on the Achilles rather than the calf.