

Warming Up

Be sure to warm up your muscles before using them for strenuous exercise. Muscles are a bit like your car; you need to get the motor humming and the oil circulating before putting it in gear. Exercising too hard and fast while the muscles are still cold can cause excessive stiffness, soreness, muscle strains or sprains, and/or torn ligaments.

Good warm-ups include jumping jacks, slow and gentle jogging in place, easy push-ups, rope jumping or any other mild aerobic activity that gets the blood pumping and the heart beating harder and faster. Because the muscles are not yet warm, it's best *not* to perform big stretches during the warm-up period. Moderate stretching, such as reaching your arms toward the ceiling or bending over to touch your toes, is fine at this point. But save the big stretches (i.e., the splits) until the body is thoroughly warmed. (It's safest if you wait until you've broken a sweat.)