

Unlocking Your Potential with the Keys to Speed

Part Two

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Stretching for Improved Speed

The foundation for having uninhibited and fluid movement is flexibility. Therefore, the first step to improving an athlete's speed is to create optimal range of motion at all major joints. The following is a brief overview of the key areas that are most commonly tight and/or overactive in athletes, along with some effective stretches to open up each area.

Hip Flexors (*Psoas*) – These muscles connect the thigh to the spine and are the root of many movement dysfunctions. When tight, these muscles will inhibit hip extension, the major movement in just about every athletic movement.

Hip Rotators (*Piriformis*) – A lot of energy is lost when the body deviates out of line, as with the feet pointed outward during sprinting. One of the culprits in causing this are the muscles that externally rotate the thigh at the hip.

Calves (*Gastrocnemius/Soleus*) – Foot and ankle mechanics are largely controlled by the calf complex. Dorsiflexion, or the lifting of the foot towards the shin, is essential to creating proper foot strike and push off.

Lateral Hamstring (*Biceps Femoris*) – The hamstrings are often the most improperly stretched muscle area. To focus on stretching the outer hamstrings, the leg must be rotated towards the midline of the body.

Stretches should be performed slow and controlled without bouncing. Repeat the series daily. All stretches can be progressed to a more dynamic movement prior to training or competition.

Eric D'Agati is the owner and director of One Human Performance Center in Pine Brook, NJ. He holds numerous national advanced-level training certifications from the National Academy of Sports Medicine, The National Strength and Conditioning Association and the Chek Institute.