

How to Get The Splits In 8 Easy Steps

Introduction

Flexibility, like all other skills, comes from practice and patience. The best way to improve flexibility is through a consistent stretching routine, which is laid out below. This report focuses on flexibility of the lower body, the most important part for jumps and splits. This routine can be followed exactly or mixed with other stretching drills, as the coach feels necessary.

Correct Stretching Technique

The point of stretching is to elongate and relax the muscles, which is why the majority of the stretching should be done at the end of a workout or practice session. Some stretching is necessary to prevent injury, but the muscles should not be completely relaxed before the practice begins or they will not be as able to respond during the practice.

All stretches should be held for a minimum of six seconds, though preferably for 15 to 20 seconds. During stretching, the muscles should be relaxed and the weight of the body should help the member ease into the stretch.

Coaches must make sure that:

- Squad members stop stretching if they feel a twinge of pain or extreme discomfort; this means they are pushing the stretch too far
- Legs are always straight during a stretch
- Squad members hold the stretch without moving for at least six seconds
- Squad members are reminded to keep the muscles relaxed, even if they are pushing for a deeper stretch

Step 1: Light Warmup

To maximize the benefits of stretching, there should be a light warmup, such as running several laps, to wake up the muscles. This should not be a strenuous run and should not tire out squad members. When the run is complete, the coach or a designated squad member should lead the squad in light stretching exercises.

During the warmup, the stretches should be held for 10 to 15 seconds, to elongate but not completely relax the muscles. The stretches will not be presented in the order they should be done, though coaches may change parts of the routine as they feel necessary.

Step 2: Standing Straddle Stretch

To begin, members should be standing with the legs spread wide with toes pointing forward or slightly out to the corners. Turn the torso so it is directly in line with one of the legs and slowly lean forward, reaching for the toes. This stretch should be felt in the hamstring, the muscle in the back of the leg.

From this position, the members can walk their hands through the middle position to get to the other leg, or they can slowly return to the start position and reverse directions. Either way, the members should stretch both legs individually before stretching the middle.

When both legs are complete, members should lean forward, reaching for the ground between their feet. For an added stretch, members can walk their hands back, reaching through the legs. During this part of the stretch, the members can move their hips slightly from side to side to change the stretch as is necessary.

To finish the stretch, members should roll up very slowly, feeling a stretch across their entire back, and finishing with the neck and head. This stretch helps with splits and jumps.



An example of the middle portion of this stretch

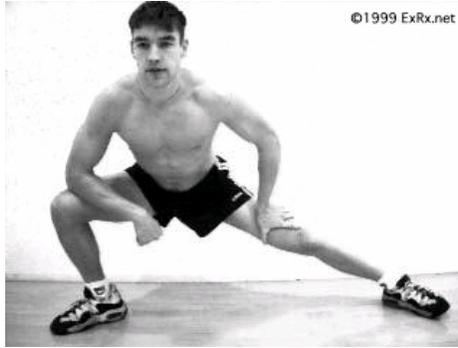
In this stretch, coaches should watch to make sure members' legs are straight and that the weight is forward, on the balls of the feet, not backward, on the heels. Once a position is reached, the members should not move or bounce but should hold the stretch, deepening it if possible.

Step 3: Standing Straddle Stretch Series (Optional)

Lunge Stretch

The Standing Straddle move can be combined into a series, if desired. When the members are stretching one leg, they can turn the leg to the side and lean down to the ground, creating a lunge stretch. One leg should be out straight and the other should be bent. This stretch helps jumps, particularly the toe touch.

Coaches must ensure that on the bent leg, the knee never goes out past the toes. This can cause serious damage to the knees. The body should be facing forward, stretching the inner thighs.



1

The Lunge Stretch. Arms can be on the legs, as shown here, or on the ground, depending on how deep the stretch is

Runner's Stretch

From the lunge position, members turn their bodies to face the bent leg, creating a runner's stretch. Again, the knee should be directly over the ankle, and the other leg should be straight and behind the member. This stretches the hip flexor, essential to jumps, as well as the back of the straight leg. Arms can be on the bent leg, on the floor on either side of the bent leg, or on the inside of the bent leg, depending on the amount of flexibility of the member.



3

Runner's stretch with the knee directly over the ankle and the arms on either side of the bent leg

Kneeling Quad Stretch

From here, lower the straight leg to the ground, resting on the knee. Bend the leg up at the knee, stretching the quadriceps, the front thigh muscle. This stretch helps jumps, tumbling, and stunting. For an extra stretch, members can reach around, same arm as leg, and grab the toe, pulling it back to reach the buttocks.



4

This picture shows the bent knee but not the arm-assisted part of the Kneeling Quad Stretch

From here, reverse the stretch series by straightening the back leg, turning the body to face forward again, and standing back up straight, into the original Standing Straddle Stretch position. This series can be done on both sides and end with the middle stretch, as described above.

Step 4: Hanging Hamstring Stretch

Members should stand with their feet together, toes pointing forward. Members should lean forward, letting the body hang and reaching for the toes. This stretch works the hamstrings and the back of the knees.

Coaches must ensure that the weight is forward and the knees are completely straight, even if that means the members' arms do not touch their shoes.



This is a variation of the Hanging Hamstring Stretch by grabbing the calves to pull the body closer

Step 5: Sitting Straddle Stretch

Squad members should sit on the floor and spread their legs as far to the side as is comfortable. Toes should be pointed, but legs should be relaxed. Members should lean forward into the stretch, making sure to keep the lower back as flat as possible. This will stretch the hips more than the hamstrings, which is essential to seeing a difference in jumps.

In this stretch, coaches should:

- Encourage members to turn out their legs by rolling their hips backward in this stretch. It makes it more difficult, but it gives the hips a much better stretch.
- Watch that the legs do not turn in as members reach forward. The legs must stay turned out, or at least with the shoelaces facing the sky. They should never turn in and face the front.
- The lower back stays flat and does not round.



4

The legs are turned out, as evidenced by the shoelaces facing slightly backward, and the lower back is straight, ensuring that the stretch stays in the inner thighs and hips

Step 6: Butterfly Stretch

The legs should be brought into a butterfly position, with the soles of the feet flat against each other in front of the body. The knees should fall as flat as is comfortable, and the members should lean forward into the stretch, keeping the lower back as straight as possible. This stretches the glutes, important in stunting and jumps.

Coaches should watch that as members lean forward, the knees do not rise up. They must stay as flat as possible during the stretch.



5

From this butterfly position pictured, the members can lean forward into the stretch, making it deeper

Step 7: Sit and Reach Stretch

From the butterfly position, members should straighten the legs and lean forward. This can be done with pointed or flexed toes, depending on the preference of the coach. The coach must ensure that all members keep their knees straight during this stretch. This stretches the back of the legs and the lower back.



4

The lower back is mostly straight and the legs are kept straight and on the floor. This picture shows the flexed toe variation

Step 8: Side and Middle Splits

From the Sit and Reach position, members should practice their splits. To do so, swing one leg back, leaving the other leg where it was from the Sit and Reach. During a split stretch, the hips should be in line over the body, not letting one lean back to open up the stretch. Members should work on both side splits and the middle splits, making sure that toes point to the ceiling during the middle splits.

Coaches must watch for overstretching during the splits, because many members will try to push down into the splits before they are ready. Encourage members to use their hands on either side of the leg to support their weight until they are flexible enough to rest on the legs.



6



7

Right side splits and middle splits. Make sure that in the middle splits the toes are pointed.

Step 9: Cooldown

These same stretches should be repeated at the end of the practice session, with more time to hang and relax. Coaches should remind members to breathe while stretching, allowing themselves to sink lower into the stretch on the exhale. This should be a soothing time to let tired muscles elongate, give five to ten minutes at the end of a practice for stretching and rejuvenation.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.pccoach.com/newsletters/May05/stretching.htm>
- 2 <http://www.exrx.net/Stretches/HipAdductors/SideLunge.html>
- 3 <http://www.pccoach.com/newsletters/May05/stretching.htm>
- 4 <http://www.ultrafitt.com/foxtips.html>
- 5 http://www.maxmuscle.com/index.cfm?fa=article&doc_id=267&subcat=strength_endurance
- 6 <http://www.lwhs.lapeer.org/Athletics/Cheerleading/JVsite.htm>
- 7 <http://www.footstepsdance.ca/photo.html>