



WHY YOU NEED TO WARM UP BEFORE EXERCISE

We've probably all skipped a warmup before we've dived into a workout, right? We may have even reasoned with avoiding it because we'll 'warm up during exercise', or 'it's just a pre-workout before my workout so what's the point?'

If you're a warmup-skipper, here are the reasons you might want to reconsider.

Warmups prepare your muscles for activity.

Think of your muscles like a car engine. They aren't raring to go at every hour of the day. A lot of the time, they're sitting fairly dormant or with certain parts under/overworked and expecting them to perform at their best instantly is expecting too much.

Warming up activates your muscles to lengthen and switches on the 'stretch reflex', sending signals to the brain that essentially optimises and 'warms up' your muscles in preparation for exercise. Muscles that have been effectively warmed up are better primed to perform at their best.

Warmups help avoid injuries.

All the muscle groups you're using throughout your workout start off 'cold' until they are warmed up and begin to function and move more fluidly. Your muscle groups have ligaments, tendons and cartilage with blood flowing through them, and when they're made to work hard without being warmed up, they're at more risk of straining, tightening, and even snapping. By warming up those hardworking parts, you help them to have a better range of movement and elasticity, decreasing your risk of injury during your workout.

Your warmup depends on your workout.

Warmups aren't a 'one size fits all' approach to exercising at peak performance. Afterall, there are around 640 skeletal muscles in the average human body, organised into major groups, each responsible for their own area. Unless you're some kind of superhero, you're probably not going to use all of them in your workout.

Different workouts with different intensities call for different warmups. For example, runners focus on warming up areas such as the hamstrings and quadriceps, while upper body workout warmups will need to target pectorals, trapezius, triceps, and biceps.

Stretching - Dynamic vs Static.

Dynamic stretching (jogging on the spot, bodyweight squats etc.) are perfect for warming up because it helps the muscles reach their full range of motion in a way that is functional and constantly active while increasing blood flow to help gear them up for action. Static stretching (long holds in the same stretched position) are ideal as a post-workout cooldown, but as a warmup, they allow the muscles to lengthen but not contract, meaning they're not getting the full range of motion they need.

How long should a warmup be?

Try to spend at least 5 to 10 minutes warming up. The more intense your workout is going to be, the longer your warmup should be. Focus first on large muscle groups and then perform warmups that mimic some of the movements you'll do while you're exercising. For instance, if you're planning to run or bike, do so at a slower pace to get warmed up.

The bottom-line.

Although often overlooked, warmup exercises are an important part of any exercise routine. Your body needs some kind of activity to get your muscles warmed up before you launch into your workout. Warming up can help boost your flexibility and athletic performance, and also reduce your chance of injury. You can either do slower versions of the movements you'll be doing during your workout, or you can try a variety of warmup exercises, like the ones suggested above.

If you're new to fitness or have a medical condition or a health concern, be sure to talk with your physical therapist or doctor before starting any new exercise program.



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