

A VERY PEDESTRIAN SUBJECT – RACE WALK NOTES - George White

FLEXIBILITY FOR RACE WALKERS

Race walks are largely endurance events, which invariably means tightness and lack of flexibility. Training and racing involve contracting muscles so it must help to flex and lengthen them by stretching. However, as serious muscle contraction is what you want in a race (perhaps more so than in running), you should not try to lengthen them before a race or serious training.

The jury is definitely still out on the advantages of stretching but few people would argue that it does any harm (other than if cold muscles are stretched). Race and training warm-ups would be better to include dynamic or ballistic stretching after the muscles are warm and before heading out. Leave the static stretches to after the event or on separate occasions (again after adequate warm-up).

*Only stretch warm muscles
Do not stretch so far as to hurt*

The need for stretching in most respects is the same as for runners; however there are some specific trouble spots for race walkers. There are hundreds of internet sites that detail all sorts of stretches and you have to work out what works for you.

1. Lower Back. A tight lower back will affect your overall posture, including causing swayback. While some tightness can be relieved by working on the hamstrings, individual attention to the lower back will pay dividends.
2. Hamstrings. Tight hamstrings will exacerbate a bent knee problem and limit stride length.
3. Hip Flexors. These are important in maximising stride length behind the body and for the push off with the rear foot.
4. Quadriceps. Tight quads, like the hamstrings may limit stride length and knee straightening.
5. Glutes and Piriformis. Flexibility in these muscles assists in hip drop, in-line front foot positioning and knee straightening.
6. Calves. Tight calves may cause pronation leading to shin splints and tendon troubles. Flexible calves will not only avoid this but assist the rear stride length and push off.
7. Other. While not as critical to race walkers all other areas of the body may benefit from stretching.

Dynamic flexibility routines

There are many dynamic flexibility drills but the following may specifically help race walkers and are useful as a pre-race routine. Begin each drill slowly and with each repetition try to increase the range of motion – but not so far as to cause pain.

Leg swings

1. Standing sideways to and holding a support, swing your outside leg forwards and backwards, bending it on the forward swing and straightening it on the backward swing. Emphasis should be on the rear swing. (Helps the hamstrings, glutes and lower back.) After about 20 swings turn around and use the other leg.
2. Facing the support, swing a leg to the right and the left, in front of the other. (Helps the groin and hips.). Switch to the other leg.

Pelvis circles

1. With both hands on a wall, arms straight and feet shoulder width apart - rotate your hips in as wide a circle as you can – in both directions. (Helps the whole pelvic area.)

Body Twists

1. Arms out to the side, feet apart – twist the upper torso to the right and then the left, keeping the legs straight. (Helps the shoulders and lower back.)
2. Now twist the body in one direction whilst moving the knees in the other direction. (Helps lower back, leg strength and hip rotation.)

Hurdles

1. With both hands on a wall and arms straight, lift one leg to the side with the knee bent and pull through as though going over a hurdle. (Good for the hip flexors and groin.) Switch legs.

Cross Overs, Figure 8's and Windmill drills as explained in the last newsletter can also be used in a flexibility routine.