

How To (and Not To) Warm-up Before a Soccer Game/Practice

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Most players either don't: (1) warm up at all, (2) warm-up long enough, or, (3) warm-up properly. This scientifically based article will tell why you should warm-up, as well as what to, and what not to do in a warm-up.

Most importantly and contrary to common belief, do NOT do static stretching before a game or practice¹ unless you have a long, predominantly dynamic movement warm-up. Do the static stretching at the end of the game or practice. Static stretching actually cools-down and weakens the muscles!¹

Why should I warm-up?²

1. Improved cardiovascular and neuromuscular performance
2. Prevention of muscle and joint injuries
3. Reduces abnormal heart responses from sudden exercise
4. Improved mental preparation

How should I warm up?

There are three phases to a proper warm-up:

1. Light aerobic exercise (5 minutes)
 - (a) Forward jogging with/without soccer ball around outside of the field 1-5 times
 - (b) Backward jogging across the field
 - (c) Side-to-side shuffling (sideways jogging) both ways across the field
 - (d) Cariocas across the field both ways across the field
2. Dynamic flexibility & athletic-type movements², light strengthening exercises and basic agility (5 – 10 minutes)
 - (a) General running technique exercises (butt kicks, high knees, drum majors etc.)
 - (b) Slow->fast flexions, extensions and rotations with exaggerated range-of-motions around the body's joints (ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, neck, spine)
 - (c) Easy strength/stability exercises – lunge walks, push-ups, sit-ups
 - (d) Basic agility/power – e.g. cutting forwards/backwards, stop 'n go's, forwards <->backwards movements, jumping headers
3. Sport-specific movements and skills (10 – 15 minutes)
 - (a) Individual basic soccer ball fast footwork and ball touches (inside/outside taps, soling, faking)
 - (b) Individual juggling the ball (keep-it-up)
 - (c) Light passing and ball movement with teammates
 - (d) Shooting on net
 - (e) Sprints with soccer ball
 - Your total warm-up should be 20-30 minutes long
 - Perform little or no static stretching¹ – save it for after the game or practice
 - Start at an easy pace and slowly build the intensity to game pace
 - Drink plenty of water before and after the warm-up
 - If you stand still for a longer period of time, or, you cool off e.g. on the side-lines in the game re-warm-up or stay loose and warm – don't cool down

References

1. 1997 Gleim & Mchugh, 1999 Bennett, 1995 Rosenbaum & Hennig, 1956 Stainsky, Fales & Lillieenthal
2. 1980 deVries, 1978 Karnoven, 1970 Lehmann, 1981 Sapega, Volkov & Mirinova