

Is getting strong the new stretch?

Stretching of course can be beneficial, if it works for you, then don't let anybody tell you different. But... do you ever feel like you have tightness in your muscles that you can't get rid of, no matter how much stretching, massage and foam rolling you do?

People are regularly asking 'what's the best stretch for my calves, hamstrings or gluteus? They just always seem tight and they get even tighter with running.'

My first question is how long have you been stretching for, if it's months then I suggest that the likelihood is, that they are dealing with a muscle that is subtly telling you it's not coping with the load your asking of it. It's not illogical to suggest that by stretching is even possibly contributing to the problem, making the muscle long and then invariable weaker.

Common areas are, calves, hamstrings and gluteal muscle groups.

The secret here is, to in fact, strengthen that muscle....

Eccentric focused exercise appears to be the go-to - the theory here is that by loading the muscle as the muscle lengthens you are actually adding sarcomeres (the tiny units of muscle that make up the length of the muscle, more sarcomeres, more length).

So what kind of exercises are we taking about?

Straight and bent knee calf raise, remember you have gastrocnemius and you have the much neglected soleus, which makes up a massive portion of you calf complex, so if you don't strengthen in a bent knee position you are missing out.

Nordic exercises for hamstrings - they are the muscles at the back of the leg that nobody bothers to strengthen because they can't see them. These exercises are gold – a great way of getting strong and preventing injury.

Gluteus muscle group - deadlifts, nice and slow on the lowering down phase.

2-3 heavy sessions per week and remember with any heavy lifting you always get a bit of stiffness/soreness, this isn't a negative, congratulations you have overloaded the muscle and it's going to adapt and get stronger. Results won't be instantaneous; it takes at least 4-6 weeks for muscle capacity to increase.

So let's move the mind set away from the stretching and get these muscles more resilient and more robust for the activities you want to do.

Get in touch – we would love to hear from you

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