

## Proper Warmup – The Key to Sports Injury Prevention

Children and teens are involved in a myriad of physical activities and sports. And whether they are at a competitive or recreational level, the basic physical requirements are the same. In order to achieve optimum training levels, it's important that the exercises prepare the athlete for the best physical outcome. The safest way to begin higher levels of training is with a proper warmup, which is an important piece to preventing injuries.

When people hear the term "warmup" in relation to physical activities, they generally think of stretching and, more specifically, static stretching that involves holding a certain position for a set amount of time. And while stretching is beneficial, the type of stretching prior to the actual activity or sport is key. A warmup that consists of dynamic stretching is most recommended by experts in sports medicine. This type of stretching involves moving your body through your own range of motion, while gradually increasing speed and reach.

During a warmup consisting of dynamic stretching the body is gently prepared for the more intense activity or sport to come. This should involve movements that are similar to those in your activity or sport but at a much lower level initially. As speed and intensity gradually increase, muscle temperature raises and heart rate increases. The increase in blood flow helps loosen joints and supplies the muscles with oxygen which helps them work more efficiently throughout the activity.

The end of a workout is the best time to work on static stretching. When muscles are warmed up properly, they are pliable and therefore, flexibility can be gained without overstretching. Maintaining good flexibility is important in injury prevention as well but it's important to note that you don't have to be overly flexible for this to happen. Moving through a healthy range of motion is enough. Overstretching can actually counteract the strength being gained through the activity.

The SKILLZ program class format was designed with this in mind. Since the foundation is rooted in martial arts, preparing the body, no matter what age, is essential in achieve skills required to further training. Each class begins with a set of movements that prepare the body for the skill-building drills that will follow. Once this part of class is complete, students then go through a set of stretches that will help increase their flexibility and work through any muscles that may have tightened up during class. Throughout class, the instructors make corrections to any movement to ensure proper execution.

Since so many children and teens are involved in physical activities and sports today, it's important that coaches teach them the proper way to prepare their bodies for the workout ahead. Many do not warmup enough and many do their warmups incorrectly. Taking time to teach children and teens the correct way now, will help prevent injuries and will give them a basic understanding of how to care for their bodies in future athletic activities.