



S-T-R-E-T-C-H!

Regular stretching can improve your performance, reduce the likelihood of muscle damage and make you feel better. Try these and feel the difference

Stretching not only makes you feel better – it improves the working of the whole muscle, thus reducing muscle fatigue. And stopping to stretch means a break from the rigours of riding.

WHAT DOES STRETCHING DO?

Stretching pulls the muscle proteins to their maximum length, relieving 'knots' in the muscle fibre, and priming it for the next series of contractions. Knots reduce the amount of muscle available, which in turn reduces the force the muscle can generate, lowering endurance. Stretching out the 'knots' primes the whole muscle for action again.

Stretching also lengthens the connective tissue in the muscle, which stimulates repair and strengthening of damaged muscle sections. Not stretching connective tissue may limit the range of movement available at the joint, contributing to tears in the muscle.

Finally, stretching relaxes muscles that are in spasm or contracting involuntarily – in other words it relieves cramps.

STRETCHING EFFECTIVELY

There are four basic rules for effective stretching:

1. A muscle must be relaxed in order to stretch. Be in a balanced position so the muscle doesn't need to work to keep you balanced during the stretch.
2. Sustain the stretch gently. Do not bounce the muscle. Gradually extend the stretch. Relax then stretch it again, holding each time for around 10 seconds.
3. Stretch all the parts of the muscle by varying the angle of movement.
4. Stretch regularly. Always warm up a little first. After the initial stretch, ride a little then stretch again, working out the tight bits (especially in the lower back), so the muscles allow joints to move as they should. Finally, stretch again at the end of the ride to work out knots and to evenly stretch the connective tissue.

THE STRETCHES

Hamstrings

Sit with one leg straight, the other bent at the knee. Stretch towards your toes, keeping your back straight and chin up.



Quadriceps

Lying on your back, bend knee to chest, pulling your heel towards your bottom, holding the lower shin. The emphasis is on stretching the front of the thigh.



Lower back

Lying on your back, bend both knees and, holding your mid shins, curl into a ball, stretching the lower back for 15 seconds. Try to relax all muscles except the arms.



Buttocks

Lying on your back, bring one knee towards the opposite shoulder. With a hand on the knee, pull towards the shoulder. Hold, then pull the knee towards the centre of your chest and hold again.



Hip flexor (a)

Lying on your back, hold one knee to your chest. This levers your pelvis back, flattening your lower back to the ground. Straighten the other leg out flat. Relax the lower body. Hold 15 seconds.



Hip flexor (b)

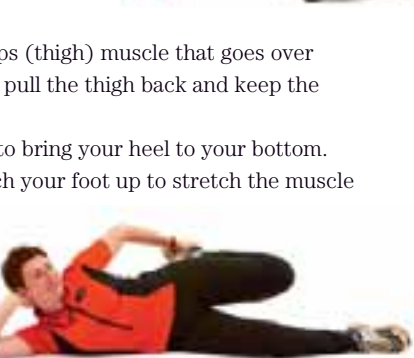
In a half kneel, rock your weight forward onto the front foot, stretching the front of the hip joint and thigh. Hold 15 seconds.



Rectus femoris (part of thigh)

This is the only part of the quadriceps (thigh) muscle that goes over both the hip and knee. To stretch it, pull the thigh back and keep the knee fully bent.

Lying on your side, bend your knee to bring your heel to your bottom. Holding the ankle behind you, stretch your foot up to stretch the muscle that runs over your knee. Simultaneously, tighten your abdominal muscles to tuck your pelvis in and further tighten the rectus femoris.



Hip adductors (a)

Sitting with soles of feet together, use your elbows to push your knees down and out. Hold 10 seconds then pull feet closer to body and hold a further 10 seconds.

Hip adductors (b)

Stand with leg to the side, keeping knee straight. Bend second leg and lean weight onto bent leg. Squat down to stretch the inner thigh of the straight leg.



Calf muscle (a) – gastrocnemius

There are two muscles in the calf: the gastrocnemius and the soleus. To stretch the gastrocnemius, lean against a wall with your hands, keeping your back heel on the ground. Keeping the back knee straight, stretch the calf muscle by bending forward at the ankle.



Calf Muscle (b) – soleus

This stretch is similar, but works the front leg. Keeping the front heel on the ground, bend the front knee.



Iliotibial band (a)

Standing side-on to the wall, lean your hip towards the wall. Feel the stretch down the side of your leg, often in the top of the 'hip'.



Iliotibial band (b)

Sit with one knee bent. Hook the opposite elbow over the outside of the bent knee and twist your trunk away from the bent knee.



Trunk side bend

Standing with feet about 50cm apart, slide your hand down the outside leg keeping your body in the same plane, i.e. don't bend forward. Stretch each side five times, alternating between them.



Shoulders

Repeat the trunk side bend, bringing your arm over your head to stretch the Latissimus dorsi muscle.



Lumbar spine

Lying on your back, bend knees then rotate them side-to-side. Keep knees together – so feet will come off the ground as you go to each side. Go side-to-side 20 times.



Pectoral (chest) muscles

Standing with one hand on a wall or door frame, hold the hand and arm in one position, and rotate your body away from the hand to stretch the pectoral muscle.



Neck

Use a hand to gently pull your head down. The chin should move towards your chest, and the pulling hand should move slowly and gently.



Trapezius muscle

With hands behind your back, use one hand to pull the other down, which pulls the shoulder down. Tip your head away from the stretching shoulder, and gently nod your head forward and back to stretch this muscle.



Rhomboid muscles

Hold one arm in a horizontal plane. Use the other arm to stretch the horizontal arm across your body. Keeping your body still, allow your shoulder blade to open, stretching the muscle that pulls the shoulder blade back.



Abdominal muscle

Lie on tummy and do a half push-up, allowing your tummy to relax down to stretch the abdominal muscles. ☺



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