

By *Mia Bremer*

### **Pickleball Injury Prevention Part 3 – Lower Body Flexibility**

There was a time in our 20s and 30s when many of us may have thought we could get away without stretching after a workout. We were wrong then and we would certainly be wrong now. The fitness industry continues to learn about how muscles respond to exercise and stretches. Things have changed in the past quarter decade and will likely continue to improve. One change is that we now understand that stretching your muscles BEFORE a workout may be counterproductive and could lead to injury because the body isn't warmed up. Instead, a ten minute whole-body warm-up prior to playing Pickleball or any other activity is the best way to get your body ready for more vigorous movement. A warm-up should include lower intensity movements that mimic the larger movements required in that sport. In this case, movements such as demi-squats, side stepping, easy rotation of the torso, arm circles and heel-toe rocking would be appropriate to ready your body for Pickleball. Save stretching exercise for after your game!

Flexibility involves lengthening muscle fibers (or rather returning them to a lengthened state) and releasing the fascia that envelops muscles, muscle fiber bundles and even individual muscle fibers. There are countless ways to accomplish this, but I am going to focus on simple stretches that you can do on the floor of the gym after a game and then some things you can do at home on non-game days to keep you moving fluidly.

Injuries can happen in tight muscles at any time, but for pickleball players, sudden movements such as a quick side step and arm reach to hit a ball or running forward or back from a standing start can lower body muscles such as the adductors (inner thigh) hamstrings (back of thigh) and quadriceps (front of thigh). Injuries to the calves, soleus and Achilles tendon are common as well.

To avoid these injuries, it's important to incorporate a daily stretching routine since gaining flexibility takes time and repetition. I am going to give you some static stretches that are effective, done daily, in lessening your chance of injury. Note, there are many methods of stretching, including assisted stretch where someone else stretches your muscles for you, active isolated stretching which involves contracting opposing muscles and dynamic stretching which may feel nice but not as effective when it comes to actual change.

Perform the following stretches daily, particularly after a game. These can all be done at the gym or park, either standing or on a mat or grass. Do one set for each group holding the stretch for 30 seconds, unless otherwise indicated. Again, I'm providing links to Six Physio which is a site I highly recommend for many exercises and stretches. Each video is about one minute in length so it's a quick view and you're off and stretching!

#### **Glute Stretch**

[\(678\) Glute Stretch - YouTube](#)

#### **Hamstring Stretch**

[\(678\) Hamstring stretch - YouTube](#)

#### **Calf and Achilles Stretch**

[\(678\) Calf Stretch - YouTube](#)

**Hip Flexor Stretch** (Dr. Kristie Ennis)

[\(678\) Stretch The Hip Flexors Correctly - YouTube](#)

When you have more time between games, you can enhance your flexibility by adding self-myofascial release techniques using inexpensive equipment such as foam rollers and Pinky Balls. Understanding fascia is a much larger topic – one that I will address in a future column. But for now, know that releasing fascia, which is a loose connective tissue covering your muscles and organs, requires two things: pressure and movement.

**Hamstring Rolling –**

Roll from hip to just above knee 10 times. (Requires upper body strength and healthy shoulders. Avoid if you have shoulder injury)



**Quadricep Rolling –**

Roll from hip to just above knee 10 times.

(Requires upper body strength and healthy shoulders. Avoid if you have shoulder injury)



**Glute Rolling –**

Roll from low back to lower edge of gluteal muscle 10 times.



**Arch of Foot Rolling –**

Roll the arch of foot from heel to ball 10 times.



Resources: [Super Pinky Ball](#) | [Massage Balls](#) | [OPTP](#)

[OPTP PRO-ROLLER Standard | Foam Roller Therapy | OPTP](#)