

5 Joint Mobility Exercises to Improve Flexibility and Function

Do you want to jump higher, run faster, and be able to move without pain?

Flexibility is the ability of your joints to move through their full range of motion without pain or stiffness. It also refers to the pliability of the muscles that support the joints. Flexible muscles and tendons allow for greater range of motion during activities.

There are many exercises you can do to improve your flexibility, including stretching. Static stretching, or holding one position for an extended period, might be your preferred method of warming up before a workout.

According to a study published in the Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, **it appears that dynamic stretching, or stretching while moving through a movement, is better than static stretching as part of a warmup.**

Just 10 minutes of a dynamic warmup prior to a workout is linked to improvements in shuttle run time, medicine ball throw distance, and jump distance.

Try these five flexibility exercises to improve your joint flexibility and function so you can move better, allowing you to improve strength and performance during your next workout.

1. Ankle mobility

Good ankle mobility contributes to better balance, fewer falls, and better performance during activities like squats and deadlifts.

Equipment needed: none

Movement: ankle dorsiflexion, plantar flexion

- Stand tall next to a wall.
- Place one hand on the wall for support.
- Slowly rock forward onto your toes, coming into a tip-toe position.
- Slowly rock back onto your heels, lifting your toes off the ground.
- Repeat 10 times.



2. Walking hip openers

Your hip joint moves in all directions. It's important to warm up the hip and surrounding muscles before any workout. They are key contributors to balance and stability.

Equipment needed: none

Muscles worked: glutes, hip flexors, hip extensors, hip abductors, hip adductors

- Stand tall with feet hip-width apart.
- Plant your feet firmly on the ground and lift your left knee to your chest.
- Make a circle with your left knee, bringing it up and across your body and then out to the side and down.
- Place your left foot on the floor and repeat on the right side.
- Repeat 10 times, then repeat sequence moving your legs in the opposite direction by bringing your leg out to the side first and then across your body.

3. Thoracic spine windmills on floor

Your thoracic spine is in the middle of your back, from the base of the neck down to where your rib cage ends.

Good mobility in the thoracic spine allows you to move your arms freely over your head and turn side to side. Poor mobility can lead to shoulder pain and problems, poor posture, and upper back pain.

Equipment needed: towel or foam roller

Muscles worked: core muscles, upper back, spine stabilizing muscles, and obliques

- Lie on the floor on your side.
- Bend your knees and hips to just past 90 degrees, resting your knees beside you on the floor.
- Straighten your bottom leg and rest your top leg on a foam roller or a towel without changing its position.
- Extend both your arms together along the floor, straight out in front of your body. They should be stacked, palms together, at shoulder height.
- Slowly lift your top arm and rotate it away from you, opening up your chest to the ceiling. Rotate your head and trunk until your hand is on the other side of your body, if possible.
- Hold this position for 3 seconds and slowly bring it back to touch your other hand.
- Repeat 5 times on each side.

4. Shoulder pass-through

Poor posture can cause many people to be tight through their chest and front of the shoulder. Warming up the shoulders before a workout will help improve your form and also prevent injury.

Equipment needed: broomstick or PVC pipe

Muscles worked: rotator cuff, anterior deltoid, chest, and upper back

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart holding a broomstick parallel to the floor. Use an overhand grip holding the bar as wide as possible.
- Keeping your arms straight, slowly raise the broomstick above your head. Hold your core tight to maintain good posture and balance.
- Bring the broomstick behind your head as far as you're able. Hold for 2 seconds and return to starting position.
- Repeat 5 times.

5. Neck half circles

Neck mobility can frequently be ignored despite its importance in everyday activities. Poor neck movement can lead to pain and problems in the neck, head, and upper back.

Equipment needed: none

Muscles worked: neck flexors and extensors, trapezius

- Sit or stand comfortably with your hands on your lap.
- Tilt your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Slowly roll your head forward to bring your chin to your chest, only going as far as you can without pain.
- Continue to roll your head to the other side until you feel a stretch along the opposite side of your neck.
- Make 3 half circles, moving slowly and smoothly through the motion.

Precautions

Always consult your doctor before starting a new exercise program. Dynamic warmup and range of motion exercises may not be appropriate for everyone, especially those with previous injuries or joint replacements.

If you're unsure that you're doing these exercises correctly, seek help from a qualified professional.

Natasha Freutel is a licensed occupational therapist and wellness coach and has been working with clients of all ages and fitness levels for the past 10 years. She has a background in kinesiology and rehabilitation. Through coaching and education, her clients are able to live a healthier lifestyle and decrease their risk of disease, injury, and disability later in life. She's an avid blogger and freelance writer and enjoys spending time at the beach, working out, taking her dog on hikes, and playing with her family.

