

STRETCH 101

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE ALARM GOES OFF.....

Move. Wiggle. Reach. Breathe. Unfold. Expand. Breathe some more.

Your body has spent the last several hours getting sticky and stiff. Now is the time to remind all of those moving parts that they can, indeed, move. Slowly, deliberately, and with compassion. What does an animal do as soon as it wakes from a nap? Streeeeetch!

Muscles do not release easily when they are cold and stiff. I believe it is more beneficial to warm them before exercise with movement rather than static stretching. Move in and out of different ranges of motion to open the joints, get the nerves sliding in their sheaths, unstick the gummy parts. Go easy with the movement. Do not force anything. Be playful and forgiving. And breathe. Think of the breath lubricating all those sticky parts and allowing them to slide and glide and be free.

Specific Ideas for pre-Rowing...

When you're brushing your teeth: put one foot on the edge of the tub or on the toilet and open the front of the hip...then the backs of the thighs.

When you're waiting for the kettle to boil for the morning Joe: bend and stretch to the sides.

When you're driving to the water: make your spine long. Defy gravity. Breathe into the stuck places. Rock your hips forward and back to loosen the pelvis. Lift your heart and let even more breath into your ribs.

When you're waiting for your boat mates: move, reach, get tall, breathe, open up and out.

When you're tying in: stretch the backs of the legs by bending forward at the hips and sliding your seat back. Breathe. Twist. Sit tall and get space in between each vertebra. Chest open. Heart lifted. You get to row this morning!!

Everyday and whenever you think of it...

Stretching your body (and your mind) does not need to be reserved for a specific session on a mat in a gym listening to Enya. Take moments everyday to create space in your body. Often the best time to stretch is when you think of it. Every time that you take a few moments to find new movement in your body, you are telling your body...all the muscles and fascia, ligaments, tendons, nerves, vessels and myo-electric goo...that it **CAN** be more fluid and open and flexible and graceful. Think cumulative effect. Each moment of stretch builds on the next moment and the next. Take moments every day and you will undoubtedly see a change in how you function in this world dominated by gravity.

Oh, yeah...and drink good, clean, hydrating fluids. All day. Everyday.

ROWING-SPECIFIC STRETCHES

HIP FLEXORS:

Place foot of non-stretching leg on a chair, fence rail, box, car bumper, etc. Engage standing leg by squeezing the glutes, quads and hams. Just squeeze it all. Tuck the tailbone under like you're flattening your low back. Hold all of that engaged and slowly tilt forward at the ankle joint. Add to this stretch by raising the stretching side's arm over-head. Rotate the whole standing leg inward and outward to aim the stretch at various angles of the hip flexors. Breathe! Move in and out of the stretch while breathing into the tight places.

CALVES/ANKLE JOINTS:

Stretch one side at a time. Gently lower your heel off of a step, a curb or some sturdy structure while supporting your weight on the non-stretching leg. Take the stretch to a comfortable discomfort. Gently contract the stretching calf muscles by just starting to do a toe raise. You are doing an isometric contraction of the calf muscles. Hold that contraction for a count of 5, then slowly lower the heel to the next end range of comfortable discomfort. Repeat 3 times.

HAMSTRINGS:

Lie on your back with both legs out straight. Bring up one knee so that the thigh is perpendicular to the floor. Keeping the thigh perpendicular, slowly straighten that knee as far as it will go with a little discomfort. Stretch into that, then release the knee and repeat several times to warm up those tissues as you ease into the new length.

Add the isometric contraction method by holding onto the back of the thigh with both hands while the knee is straight. Resist the thigh as you push it towards the floor with the knee still straight, counting to 5. Release and take thigh to new range of motion. Repeat 3 times.

SIDE BODY:

This includes the obliques, the latts, the spinal erectors, the rib muscles and so much more. Increase the space between your ribs and hip bones. Elongate the spine in order to increase your reach towards the Catch of the stroke, and to give your lungs more room to expand.

Do this standing or sitting in a chair. Root the leg (or hip) of the side to be stretched by reaching down to the earth while you reach your arm and shoulder girdle up and over an imaginary big ball on the opposite side. Lift up in order to reach over, creating space on the "ball side" rather than collapsing on that side. Up and over. Breathe! Reach. Relax. Reach. Relax. Reach. Relax.

And breathe.

