

6: Stretching for Triathletes

There is ongoing controversy over the topic of stretching amongst sport scientists & coaches. The main reason is that it is hard to measure flexibility – the errors associated with valid & reliable measurement make determining significant results challenging. However, “anecdotal evidence” will show you that athletes and health & fitness providers have had success at eliminating chronic injuries by using stretching to lengthen specific muscle groups & fascia (the connective tissue that surrounds muscle, sort of like “Saran Wrap”).

I spent 7 years reading sport science literature and researching everything from “Caffeine and Endurance Performance” to “The Effects of Deer Velvet Supplementation on Endurance Performance” - but I don’t need a research paper to tell me that if I fail to stretch my ITB (iliotibial band) & gluteal group I will start feeling a distinct pain on the lateral part of my knee after a few weeks of running; and I don’t need a research paper to tell me that if a cyclist neglects to stretch their gluteal muscle group they may develop hip & low back pain.

Triathletes often have a Type “A” personality - they spend 99% of their free time swimming, biking & running, using the same muscle groups over and over again. However, when it comes to devoting time for stretching they usually run out of time.....until an injury occurs and they are physically reminded that tight muscles & fascia hamper joint movement and cause excess friction across joints.

These chronic injuries resulting from muscle shortening are predictable in triathletes, and stretching can prevent these disabling set-backs. That is why Tracey Pope (Registered Physiotherapist, triathlete), Whistler Physiotherapy and I decided to produce a stretching handout that we could give to our endurance athletes. It has been researched (as much as stretching can be researched?) and used successfully for 3 years within the Whistler corridor. Is this the secret behind the Whistler Triathlon Club’s strong provincial standings? Probably not, but it does keep many of our athletes injury-free!

Have a look at the handout we have provided – the examples we have used are the most effective stretches for triathletes. If you find that regular stretching is not relieving your muscle shortness then you should seek the expertise from a Registered Physiotherapist; Registered Massage Therapist; Strength & Conditioning or Movement Specialist.

References:

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