

# The Warm-Up & Cool-Down

On any given day when you spend time doing physical activity it is called your physical activity session, or exercise session. Every session should include three stages: a warm-up, a workout, and a cool-down.

## The Warm-Up

A warm-up is a series of activities that prepares your body for more vigorous physical activity, enhances performance, and helps prevent injuries. Most warm-up consist of two parts, and heart warm-up and a muscle stretching warm-up.

One of the most important muscle in your body, the heart, needs to be warmed up like any other muscle in the body. This should include several minutes (at least two) of walking, slow jogging, jump roping, or similar activity, which prepares the heart for more vigorous activity. This increases total body temperature as well as increases muscle temperature and blood supply to the muscles. Warm muscles will contract and relax more efficiently than cool muscles.

The muscle-stretching phase of the warm-up consists of exercises that slowly stretch the muscles to loosen and relax them. Most experts believe that warm, relaxed muscles are less likely to be strained or pulled than short, tight muscles.

Many lifestyle activities, such as walking, do not need a warm-up. However, you should do a warm-up for any activity that is vigorous or requires a lot of muscle stretching. People who participate in vigorous activities, especially sports, should design a personal warm-up to prepare them for that specific activity. Follow these guidelines to help you develop your own warm-up:

- Your heart warm-up should last at least 2 minutes and up to several minutes. It might include walking, slow jogging, slow swimming, slow bicycling, or a similar activity. Your goal is to gradually increase your heart rate and warm the large muscles of the body.
- Do your heart warm-up both before and after your muscle stretching warm-up. The first gets the muscles ready for stretching and the second gets you ready for more vigorous activity after the stretching.
- Stretch slowly and easily. Do not bounce, jerk, or try to stretch too far. The warm-up is meant to get you ready for your workout; it is not the time for a flexibility workout.
- When preparing for sports or other vigorous activities, include a few slow, easy movements that are similar to the activity you will do. For example, if you are going to pitch for a baseball game, you should warm up your throwing arm. Start by making a few easy, short throws. Gradually work up to longer, harder throws as your arm muscles become warmer and more limber.

## The Cool-Down

Just as important as the warm-up is the cool-down, your body needs to recover from the demands of physical activity.