

“If I Work on Flexibility Will I Run Faster?” Take These Two Tests

Many of the athletes that we see come to use in hopes of running faster. There are many components to developing speed including strength, balance, running form, starts, core or abdominal strength, etc. One of the first areas we access is flexibility of the hip region. Increasing your running speed involves improving your stride length (the length of your step when running) and/or stride frequency (how fast your legs turn over when you run).

If the front of your hips (hip flexors) or back of your legs (hamstrings) are tight then you cannot have an optimal stride length. This will make you less effective as you sprint from one area to the next.

Take these two tests to see if you need work on the following areas.

Test 1 – Hip Flexors

Sit on the edge of a table or bed, then lie back bringing both knees to your chest. Place both hands on one knee and allow the other leg to slowly fall straight down. While holding your knee with both hands and gently pulling it towards your chest, the back of your other leg should touch the table or bed. If not, you have tightness in the front of your hips and this will shorten your stride when running.

This tightness also places more stress on your back when you run and is one of the leading causes of back injuries in athletes.



Notice on the above left how the back of the leg touches the table and the right it does not. You should perform this test each month in young and growing athletes. If you are deficient in this area you need to perform a hip flexor stretch and hold for one minute.

Test 2 – Hamstrings

Lie on your back. Start with both legs straight and toes pointing towards the sky. Bring one knee towards your chest and place both hands behind that knee. Maintaining your hip at a right angle (90 degrees) and hands behind your knee as seen in the picture below slowly straighten your leg. You should be able to straighten your knee completely without much tightness.

Failure to do this indicates that you have tight hamstrings and this will also shorten your stride length (i.e. decrease your speed). This tightness also places more stress on your back and can lead to back pain if not addressed.



The picture above on the left demonstrates good hamstring flexibility while the picture on the right demonstrates an athlete with hamstring tightness. Again this test should be performed monthly and if deficient the athlete should perform hamstring stretches holding for one minute.

Improving these two areas can significantly increase an athlete's running speed and decrease some of their injury potential (low back pain, hamstring strains, hip flexor injuries, groin pulls, etc).

****Remember to:**

- 1) Always plan ahead for what you are going to eat
- 2) Obtain adequate amounts of protein
- 3) Work on your flexibility and
- 4) Supplement your diet with a fish oil and multivitamin

Let me know if I can help. Email me architectsports@gmail.com

Alan Tyson

Physical Therapist, Athletic Trainer, Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist