

WHY! COOL-DOWN?

The Cool Down.

What is the Cool Down? The Cool Down is the process by which we help the body to gradually adjust from exercise to rest.

Why is it important?

1. To clear away the waste products of exercise. During a game or an intense training session the body produces waste products as a result of the need to produce some of its energy quickly. If, after a game or training, players simply stop and walk to awaiting cars to be taken home, these waste products tend to remain in the muscle for an extended period of time. One of the main causes of muscular soreness and stiffness is the accumulation of these products one of which is lactic acid.

Studies have shown that some form of light activity following a game or training session can accelerate the process by which these waste products are removed from the body, thus reducing stiffness and soreness and helping the body recover more quickly. Tests show that lactic acid is removed at least three times faster when light cool down activities are used.

2. To provide an opportunity for quality stretching work. The Cool Down also provides a perfect opportunity for further stretching work to be done.

As we all know, the muscles are best stretched fully and remain at the stretched length longer when they are as warm as possible. The best time for this is after training or a game. Stretches in the Cool Down period should focus on major muscle groups and can be held longer than in the Warm-Up. Some muscles have been found to shorten following intense use, and do not return to normal for up to two days afterwards. Continual activity without stretching work can lead to limited performance. Stretching during Cool Down can prevent this.

What elements should a Cool Down for Soccer contain?

1. Light rhythmical activities such as simply jogging, skipping or walking around the field, or low intensity pass and move patterns, stressing no coaching and a low work rate. Rhythmical whole body exercises help to maintain blood flow and assist in the removal of waste products such as lactic acid.

2. Longer hold stretching work designed to promote maintenance of muscle length. Stretches should target the major muscles used, i.e. calves, hamstrings,

quads, abductors (outside of thighs), adductors (inside of thighs), hip flexors, gluteals, lower back, arms, shoulders, and neck. Players should hold stretches for a minimum of 10 to 15 seconds, and perform two sets on the major leg muscles (calves, hamstrings, quads).

3. Limb shaking Gently shaking limbs can help promote return of blood to the heart and feelings of relaxation. Cool down may finish with players lying on the ground, raising legs above the head, and getting a partner to gently shake them.

4. Re-hydration The Cool Down period is an excellent time for players to take in fluids/sports drinks to assist in recovery.

A Suggested Cool Down for Soccer

Following is a suggested format for Cool Downs. The exercises included are only Examples you can substitute any other exercise as long as it meets the objective of each phase of Cool Down. All players should be encouraged to put on additional clothing sweatshirts and tracksuit bottoms to reduce inevitable heat loss. Where possible, drinks should be provided to assist with re-hydration.

Phase One

Objective To assist in the removal of waste products through gentle rhythmic exercises.

Content Post Training:

- Slow jogging and skipping emphasis on loose limbs to get players to shake arms and legs gently as they move.
- Passing in a small area emphasis on low work rate, relaxed movement.
- Duration: 3-5 minutes.

Content Post Match:

- Gentle, half-pace jogging using the length of the field.
- Slow jogging and skipping, including sideways and backwards, encouraging loose limbs (shaking arms and legs as they move).
- Duration: 5 minutes.

Phase Two

Objective To stretch muscles to normal length to reduce stiffness and soreness.

Content Both post training and post game:

- Stretches for the major groups: calves, hamstrings, quads, adductors, hip flexors, gluteals, lower back, shoulders and neck. All stretches should be

held for a minimum of 10 to 15 seconds, with two sets performed on tight areas and calves, hamstrings and quads.

- Duration: 5 minutes.

Phase Three

Objective To assist in the return of blood to the heart and to promote relaxed movement of limbs.

Content Both post training and post game:

- Shake limbs lightly.
- Lie down with legs raised and held by another player. Gently shake leg for 30 seconds, keeping knees slightly bent.
- Duration: 2 minutes.

Making Cool Down A Habit

Cool Down is relatively easy to reinforce after a training session because it can be added as part of the session itself. Games are a completely different situation, with both players and coaches often reluctant to add a cool down period. Following are some keys to implementing cool down in both cases.

Post Training:

- Reinforce cool down during training. **It should be a planned part of every session.**

Ask players to take control of the cool down, after participating in several sessions themselves. This reinforces the habit.

Include fun activities as part of the cool down, such as head/foot juggling in small groups.

Post Match:

Cool down should be led by the coach to make it as easy as possible for the players to do. When possible, drinks and warm clothing should be made available. Players may finish a game, have a few minutes to have a drink and put on extra clothes, and then go back on the field for a cool down led by the coach. In tournament play, where players may play a number of games over a two to three-day period, a Cool Down can significantly assist in recovery.

Get Organized - Stay Cool - Stay Injury Free