



Hamstring Pulls

Nick Wegener, PT, DPT, ATC, CSCS

Next time you suffer one of those annoying hamstring pulls, instead of simply trying to stretch it out you should initially start with some controlled agility exercises at a low intensity level. It's also good to include some core strengthening exercises.

Current research has revealed that decreased healing time and reoccurrence of these nagging injuries can be accomplished by adopting this method. The agility exercises are specific and not meant to stretch the hamstring, but rather keep the muscle in a shortened state. They consist of the following:

1. Side Stepping
2. Grapevine or Carioca Stepping
3. Front to Back Stepping (while moving sideways down the line).

Complete each exercise over a 10 foot distance back and forth for 1 minute. Then repeat the sequence two more times.

Next, include the following four (4) core strengthening exercises:

1. Stand on one leg (works your neuromuscular control). Progress to standing on a pillow with your eyes closed (be careful!).
2. Perform a bridge (lay on your back with knees bent, lift your bottom while keeping your shoulder blades in contact with table). Hold this position for 5-10 seconds.
3. Side plank (from a side lying position, go up onto your elbow and the edge of your feet by lifting the hip off table).
4. Front plank (lay on your stomach and go up onto your elbows and toes while holding your abdominal muscles tight).

Complete each exercise and hold for 20 seconds. Repeat each one 3 more times.

Remember, pain should not be present or at least very minimal with each exercise. You can gradually increase the intensity of the agility exercises using pain as your guide. Always conclude the activities with 20 minutes of icing to the hamstrings while sitting with your legs straight out. A bag of frozen peas works very well for this. Expect a 2-4 week recovery, depending on the severity of the muscle strain.

By following these initial steps you will decrease your recovery time and help detour the likelihood of reoccurrence.

Reference: Sherry, M., Best, T. "A comparison of 2 Rehabilitation Programs in Treatment of Acute Hamstring Strains" JOSP, 34:3, 116-125.