

Warm up?

Regardless of your exercise activity, be it martial arts, soccer, badminton or weight lifting, a warm-up has a huge influence on your performance. Not only can a proper warm-up prevent injuries (and even boost your strength and overall performance) but an incorrect one can make you more susceptible to the same setbacks you are trying to avoid.

What is the purpose of a “warm-up” anyway? By its very label “Warm-up” the suggestion is made that you should increase heat. By moving and contracting muscles you increase circulation to those muscles. This increased blood flow will increase the heat and pliability of those very same muscles and surrounding connective tissue. A warm-up should raise the core temperature of every major muscle group, increase your joint mobility and activate your central nervous system. This will aid in activating more muscle fibers (strength) and coordinated muscular contraction. In other words, “You should be sweating when finished and static stretching will not accomplish this.”

Professional athletes and their trainers have geared their warm-ups to more of a dynamic nature. Where dynamic warm-ups activate your central nervous system static stretches have a somewhat opposite effect. There have even been several studies that have shown that static stretching prior to training will have negative effects on your strength and speed during that session.

It is not that static stretches don't have their place in your training it is just that they should not make up the majority of your warm-up. Placing these stretches at the end of your work out will allow you to stretch when you are the warmest and the most pliable. This in turn will allow you to challenge your range of motion when you are the least susceptible to injury. Techniques like P.N.F. stretching is a activity I would never do at the beginning of a workout but would be quite beneficial at the end of a good sweat.

The question that you may have now is what kind of exercises should I do for a warm-up. The answer is a varied as the styles of martial arts. There are literally hundreds of combinations of exercises you could use for a good warm-up.

Although it is always good to warm-up the entire body you might first consider what you will be doing during your training session ie: kicking & lower body, punching & upper body, ground grappling or more total body. Then make sure that those muscles that will be concentrated on get movements that will fully heat them up.

Also, keep in mind that after your general type movements such as jogging, jumping jacks, planks, supermans or suicides, you include specific types of movements that mimic the martial art movement you will be asking of your body.

For example if you are concentrating of ground jiu-jitsu you might include in your warm-up movements like bridges, shrimping, rolls and breakfall drills to thoroughly warm up the core with sport-specific activities. If you are going to do a lot of kicking then going through those kicks slowly will challenge the muscles, and allow time to focus on techniques (as well as providing a heck of a pump). This will prepare the muscles you will be training but also help with the mental focus on the techniques to be trained. Thereby also camouflaging repetition, which is always a good thing in the dojo.

The best advice I can give is don't limit yourself to the same old exercises. If you have other experience from Yoga, an aerobics class, boxing or a book you've read, give it a try. The more creative you get, but yet at the same time keeping it simple, the more you may find yourself and your students progressing. Keep it fun! It may even help with student retention.

Terry Langevin

Instructor, Terry Langevin Educational Systems

2terrylangevin@gmail.com