WARM UP

A warm-up should be the first activity in every training session or competition. It helps prepare the body and mind for the activity we are about to do.

Warm-ups should begin at a slow pace and gradually make it a little faster and more difficult

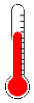
Physical Benefits:

Warm-up prepares the body for sport or exercise and helps to prevent injury by:

Increasing heart rate.

Increasing breathing rate.

Increasing blood flow to the active muscles.



Increasing body and muscle temperature.

Mental Benefits

Warm up prepares the mind to focus on the sport or exercise by:

- Helping athletes shift focus from life to sport.
- Mentally reviewing skills previously learned.
- Connecting the mind and the body (e.g. link hand and eye coordination)

A warm-up helps us to reach a state of physical and mental readiness. When we prepare the body and mind, we are less likely to suffer an injury and will perform better at each practice, training and competition.

How do we warm up?

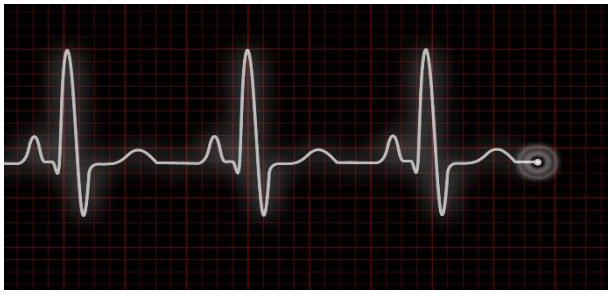
Every sport is different. Each sport has specific skills and movements. The warm-up should be personalized to the sport and the ability levels of the athletes. Read our coaching guide for your sport for more detail.

However, some general elements should be included in all warm-ups, regardless of the sport.

Components of a Warm Up

- Aerobic activity to raise heart rate
- Dynamic Stretches
- Sport Specific movements

Aerobic Activity (5 mins)



Aerobic activities are whole body movements that will increase the heart rate (e.g. walking, jogging, skipping or dancing. It should start at a slow pace and gradually increase in intensity/difficulty and last at least 5 minutes. Athletes should feel warm, a little out of breath and energised by the end. This can be a really fun part of your training session. You can introduce games or dances. Involve your athletes in choosing the activity. Try to be creative. Routine can be helpful for some athletes, but variety is also important.

Dynamic Stretches (5-10mins)

Now that the body is warm, it is time to focus on stretching the muscles you will use during your sport. Experts recommend using dynamic stretches in a warm-up.

Definition of dynamic stretching

Dynamic stretches consist of active controlled movements that take body parts through a full range of motion. Some examples are arm circles and leg swings. These are better than traditional stretches in the warm up because the body temperature and heart rate stay elevated. In addition, dynamic stretches have been shown to reduce injury better than traditional stretches.
You will find lots of useful dynamic stretching routines for your own sport online. Remember, you must pay particular attention to the muscle groups you will use in your sport.

Check out our Resources webpage for more information. There will soon be a Stretching Guide with really useful information on stretches (both dynamic and traditional). You can also see our Fitness Cards and Videos http://resources.specialolympics.org/Fitness-Cards/#.WXWqrFGQyHs with some excellent stretches and flexibility exercises.

Sport Specific movements (5-10 mins)

This is the final part of the warm-up. In this section, focus on skills or movements which are core to your sport. This helps prepare these muscles, joints and ligaments and the mind for the movements the body will repeat in the session. This part of the warm-up can be a great way to review and practice previously learned skills and should move from simple to more complex skills. You may want to incorporate some drills for skill-related fitness, like agility, balance, or speed drills. It can help to have a predictable routine with your athletes for this section. Remember! We are still warming-up and preparing the body, so athletes should be as active as possible. Avoid spending time on lengthy explanations.

COOL-DOWN

When your training session is complete, you should always cool-down. It is just as important to have a good cool-down as it is to have a good warm up. A good cool-down allows the body to gradually return to a state of rest.

Purpose of a cool-down:

- Decrease heart rate.
- Decrease breathing rate.
- Decrease body and muscle temperature.
- Returns rate of blood flow from the active muscles to resting level.
- Decrease muscle soreness.
- Improve flexibility.
- Increases the rate of recovery from exercise.
- Promote relaxation.

A typical cool-down includes light aerobic activity followed by stretching. The aerobic activity should gradually decrease in intensity/difficulty. It could be a light jog, moving into a brisk walk and finally ending to a slow walk. You may also include some strength and conditioning exercises.

Stretching for flexibility is very effective in the cool-down. Traditional stretches (sometimes called Static Stretching) are held for 30 seconds or more and can help to improve flexibility. Visit our Fitness Cards (http://resources.specialolympics.org/Fitness-Cards/#.WVK8duvyupq) for flexibility stretches. Each sport places stress on different muscles and joints; so it is important to make your stretches sport specific. Stretches should be performed to mild discomfort, but should not be painful. It is important to coach your athletes on the intensity of a stretch.

NOTE: You should be aware of any athletes who are hypermobile. (This is common in athletes with Down syndrome). It is especially important to ensure that these athletes are cautious about the intensity of each stretch.
The cool-down is also a great chance for coaches to review the session, to tell athletes what to expect at the next session, and to ask for feedback from athletes. Remind your athletes they need to drink water and have a healthy snack to help recover from practice.

The Fit 5 Guide http://resources.specialolympics.org/fit-5/#.WVK8Vuvyupq has suggestions for healthy snacks and recommendations for proper hydration. This is a good time to introduce relaxation techniques (e.g. controlled breathing and visualisation).