

Stretching for success

| LAUREN ROBERTS

Whether before a game, after a long day at work, or breaking up hours slouched over a desk, stretching is often the most neglected part of the day, but it is essential for staying healthy.

According to Harvard Health, frequent stretching improves range of motion and allows muscles to work more efficiently, both of which play important roles in athletic performance and injury prevention.

"Warm-ups get the body ready to move by getting blood flow into the tissues, and cool-downs signal to

the body that the activity is over, so you're not just holding onto tension all day long. It's important to have flexibility because otherwise, you put yourself at risk for

increased soreness, tightness, and the possibility of strains," said Celine Estrada, Carlmont's athletic

trainer, who works with athletes across all sports.

Carlmont varsity girls soccer coach Jillian Quan also believes that stretching is an essential part of preparation before any physical activity, especially in high-impact sports.

"When muscles are warm and flexible, athletes are less likely to pull something or strain a muscle during intense movement," Quan said.

But stretching isn't just an important precaution against injuries. It's also an integral part of the recovery process after an injury occurs.

Junior Sophia Lee is a Carlmont varsity soccer player who tore her anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). According to her, while stretching has been part of her routine for a long time, as she prepares for surgery, physical therapy and stretching have become even more important for rehabilitation.

"I think it keeps your muscles healthy, flexible, and helps recovery in general. I'm focusing on flexibility because I have to get my leg straight before I can get the surgery," Lee said. Carlmont

varsity girls basketball coach Richard Stephans has his players warm up and stretch before every practice and game. It is a nonnegotiable part of his program, and he said that it helps athletes stay healthy throughout the season.

"It does enhance performance, but more than anything else, it is injury prevention, short-term and long-term. So we do it before every practice, just to help protect the body," Stephans said.

Stretching doesn't always need to be time-consuming to be effective, and even short stretches can make an impact. According to Mayo Clinic, stretching for five to ten minutes two to three times a week can still be beneficial and help maintain consistency.

"Even five minutes of stretching can help if it's done correctly," said Natalia Manzanares, Carlmont's JV soccer coach.

According to Mayo Clinic, many people don't breathe when stretching, but the proper form is to take slow, deep breaths.

"The biggest mistake I see is students holding their breath. You can actually get a deeper stretch by doing the exact opposite. If you breathe in through your nose and out through

your mouth, every time you breathe out, you get a deeper stretch," said Manzanares.

Typically, stretching falls into two categories: dynamic and static. Each serves a different purpose, and the type used can vary depending on the activity, sport, and the time it's completed.

"For basketball, dynamic stretching is done while you're moving, and as a warm-up, it is much more effective than just static stretching. You start off slow, and you increase in intensity until you're ready to perform," Stephans said.

Carlmont sophomore Gabe Tse, a varsity dancer, incorporates stretching into his daily routine using a different approach.

"Before class, we do mostly static stretches to get warmed up, but at the end, it's mostly dynamic because it helps cool down and loosen the muscles," Tse said.

Still, for athletes and non-athletes alike, stretching is a small investment that carries long-term benefits.

"If you invest just five minutes now, it's better than being out from an injury for five months," Manzanares said.



Tse lifts his right leg upward, holding it with his right hand to deepen the stretch. Photo by **Shiori Chen**



Sitting in a straddle stretch, Tse raises his left arm over to his right leg, easing tension in his lower back, hamstrings, and calf muscles. Photo by **Shiori Chen**



Planting his palms firmly on the floor, Tse moves into the cobra yoga pose, a face-down backbend that stretches the spine, opens the chest and shoulders, and lengthens. This popular stretch is especially effective for counteracting long periods of sitting.

Photo by **Shiori Chen**



With his legs crossed, Tse uses his left arm to hold his right arm across his chest in a cross-body shoulder stretch. This static stretch helps improve shoulder mobility and flexibility. Photo by **Shiori Chen**

Carlmont Dance Team member Gabriel Tse, a sophomore, performs a reclining Hero yoga pose to stretch his quadriceps, knees, ankles, and deep hip muscles. He looks up at the ceiling with his chin lifted, not tucked into his chest, while extending his arms overhead. "I would recommend stretching even for people who don't do sports. It can help you feel a lot better in your daily life," Tse said. Photo by **Shiori Chen**

