# Soccer (Football) Stretches and Flexibility Exercises

## Soccer stretching exercises to improve your game and do away with soccer injuries for good.

Soccer (Football) is played between two teams of 11 players each. Soccer is a ball game played on a rectangular grass or artificial field, with a goal at each end of the field. Players attempt to score points by manoeuvring the ball into the opposing goal. Only the goalkeepers or goalies are permitted to touch the ball with hands or arms, all other players must use their feet, occasionally their knees or in some cases, their heads. The team scoring the most points by the end of play is the winner. At times extra time is allotted should the two teams reach a tie at the game’s end.

If you're looking to improve your soccer game or just seeking to prevent soccer injuries it is important to follow the information in this article. In addition, adding a few simple stretches to your fitness program will also help.



The origins of soccer are unknown, though similar sports involving the kicking of a ball clearly have ancient roots in many parts of the world. Some have suggested the earliest clear evidence for a soccer-like game points to China of the 2nd and 3rd centuries B.C. A Roman game known as harpastum appears likewise related to soccer, (though it was played with a smaller ball, more closely resembling a softball). Differing forms of sport resembling soccer thrived in medieval Europe, though rules depended on locale and specific period.

Soccer - generally considered the most popular sport in the world - may owe its appeal to simplicity as well as the skill and cunning required in the fast-paced intrigue of the game. Played at a professional level all over the world as well as by serious amateur teams as well as for pure enjoyment, soccer is a regular pastime for over 240 million people in over 200 countries worldwide. The Soccer World Cup, held every four years, pits the top teams in the world against each other and draws enormous audiences for both the stadium games and television.

**Anatomy Involved**

While the feet are obviously of vital importance in the kick, the game of soccer employs a wide range of muscles. These include:

* Abdomen: Rectus Abdominis
* Obliques External & Internal Oblique
* Back: Latissimus Dorsi & Teres Major
* Buttock: Gluteus Maximus, Medius & Minimus
* Quadriceps: Rectus Femoris, Vastus Lateralis, Intermedius & Medialis
* Hip flexor/rotator: Iliopsoas & Sartorius
* Groin: Gracilis, Adductor Brevis, Longus & Magnus
* Hamstring: Biceps Femoris, Semitendinosus, Semimembranosus
* Calf: Gastrocnemius

Rapid speed, agility and power are required in soccer. In addition to the conditioning of the muscles of the legs, success in soccer requires upper body and core muscular training and exercise, particularly in the stomach and the back. This is essential both for the frequent sprinting bursts required of the game but also for stability and to keep the player from easily being knocked from the ball he is trying to manoeuvre.

Among the most important muscles in soccer (and most frequently injured) are the hamstrings. These muscles occur at the back of the thigh, above the knee and just below the buttock. Hamstrings assist in flexing the knee joint (aided by the gracilis and the sartorius muscles) and also work to extend the hip joint. Rotation of the lower leg when the knee is bent is also accomplished by hamstring muscles. Further, hamstrings act to slow the body down and break or reverse direction after a run. Finally, hamstrings act to help keep the trunk properly aligned.

Hamstrings are actually a muscle group composed of the following:

* Semimembranosus or musculus semimembranosus. This muscle is closest to the inside of the thigh (most medial) and is named for its membranous tendon of origin.
* Semitendinosus or musculus semitendinosus. The semitendonous, lies between the other two muscles of the hamstring group in the middle of the back of the thigh.
* Biceps femorus or musculus biceps femorus. This muscle runs along the outer portion (most lateral) of the back of the thigh.

Hamstring muscles all run past the knee joint and receive their blood supply from branches of the deep femoral artery.



**Most Common Soccer Injuries**

Soccer injuries may be categorized as either cumulative (overuse) or acute (traumatic). Overuse injuries are frequently caused by excessive stress to muscles, joints and soft tissues over an extended period of time. Initial symptoms may include nagging ache or pain, but can progress to debilitating injury if not properly attended to, including allowing adequate healing time. Acute injuries by contrast usually involve sudden, sharp, in severe cases, excruciating pain. Most common injuries include:

* [Ankle Sprains](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/ankle-injuries-pt1.php): Involving the stretching or tearing of ligaments surrounding the ankle joint - the most common ankle injury.
* [Achilles Tendonitis](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/achilles-tendonitis-pt1.php): an overuse injury causing pain to the back of the ankle. While generally not serious, failure to address the injury can lead to rupture of the Achilles tendon.
* [Pulled Groin](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/groin-pain.php): common soccer injury caused by overstretching of the groin (adductor) muscle. A groin pull or strain occurs when the muscles of the inner thigh are stretched beyond their limits.
* Concussion: due to a sudden traumatic impact or blow to the head.
* [Hamstring Strain, Pull, or Tear](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/hamstring-injury-treatment.php): one of the most common injuries for soccer, ranging in severity from minor strain to complete rupture of these muscles, located at the back of the thigh.
* [Iliotibial Band Syndrome](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/knee-pain.php): characterized by pain on the outside or lateral portion of the knee.
* [Anterior Cruciate Ligament](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/acl-injuries.php) (ACL) and [Posterior Cruciate Ligament](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/acl-injuries.php) (PCL) injuries: both common afflictions of the knee, often caused by frequent starts and stops.
* Torn Knee Cartilage ([Meniscus Injury](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/meniscus-tear.php)): may result from twisting, sudden impact, or deceleration. The meniscus is a segment of cartilage which acts as a cushion between the femur and tibia.

**Injury Prevention Strategies**

Soccer injuries may often be the result of overuse, poor conditioning, lack of proper rest or insufficient warm-up. Overall, soccer players require specific, targeted exercises emphasizing strength, endurance, flexibility and range of motion. This is especially true in the case of injury-prone muscle groups, ligaments, tendons, etc. The hip adductor muscles, ankles, hamstrings, and knees are all areas requiring specialized exercise. Additionally, the following steps can reduce the likelihood of injury:

* Never begin play before proper warm-up and stretching. Brief running or walking, stationary cycling, and jumping jacks help properly prepare muscles.
* Adequate footwear is particularly critical in soccer. Shoes with molded cleats or ribbed soles should be worn, and particular care must be taken on wet playing fields.
* Shin guards help protect the lower legs, which are prone to injury.
* Ensure adequate padding on soccer goals, to avoid head injury. The playing surface must be kept in good condition.
* Carefully check playing field for holes, bare areas or any obstructions.

**The Top 3 Soccer Stretches**

Stretching is one of the most under-utilized techniques for improving athletic performance, preventing sports injury and properly rehabilitating sprain and strain injury. Don't make the mistake of thinking that something as simple as stretching won't be effective.

Below are 3 very beneficial stretches for soccer; obviously there are a lot more, but these are a great place to start. Please make special note of the instructions beside each stretch.

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| Soccer stretch for the quads | **Kneeling Quad Stretch**: Kneel on one foot and the other knee. If needed, hold on to something to keep your balance and then push your hips forward. |
| Soccer stretch for the hamstrings | **Sitting Single Leg Hamstring Stretch**: Sit with one leg straight out in front and point your toes upwards. Bring your other foot towards your knee and reach towards your toes with both hands. |
| Soccer stretch for the groin | **Squatting Leg-out Adductor Stretch**: Stand with your feet wide apart. Keep one leg straight and your toes pointing forward while bending the other leg and turning your toes out to the side. Lower your groin towards the ground and rest your hands on your bent knee or the ground. |

Article by Brad Walker and Injury Fix™

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