

THE TACTICAL WARM-UP

By Rick Regan

The value of performing some type of warm-up prior to any vigorous physical activity is well established. Exercise physiologists as well as athletes at all levels have demonstrated that warming up yields improved performance. Warmer muscles are more responsive to physical demands.

Tactical athletes in special units in law enforcement (SWAT, HRT, etc.) may also benefit from an appropriate warm-up prior to conducting their missions. However, there are some unique differences between athletes preparing for a workout and emergency response personnel preparing to execute a tactical operation. The objective of this article is to offer suggestions for creating a warm-up to fit the unique situations encountered by tactical operators.

In general, a warm-up should consist of mild to moderate activity and stretching. The intensity of the warm-up should start low and gradually increase to the level of intensity that will be used in the main part of the workout. For an athlete, this might include easy jogging around a gym or track or even some mild work on an exercise machine and stretching on a padded surface. Obviously, tactical operators in the field will not have access to a workout facility nor will they have the time and space for this type of warm-up. In fact, they may be required to remain in position and alert for hours as the tactical situation evolves.

Special operators are exposed to a variety of high intensity tactical situations. Most of these situations require quick, explosive stop-and-go movements, multidirectional mobility and frequent displays of power.

Being physically ready to perform this type of “workout” necessitates a functional stretching warm-up. This warm-up must be appropriate for indoors or outdoors. It must be doable in a limited amount of space and under varied climatic conditions. The participant should be able to perform the warm-up while wearing tactical gear or at least tactical clothing minus the gear. The warm-up needs to be of short duration and easily repeatable over the course of extended tactical situations without creating undue fatigue.

TACTICAL WARM-UP

SHOULDERS

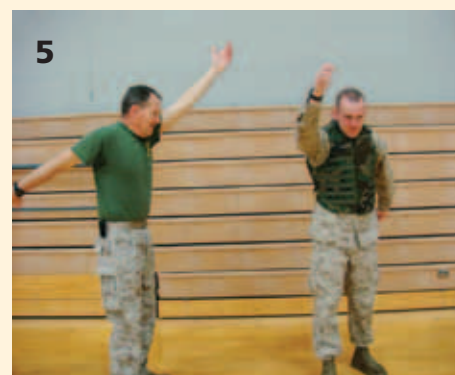
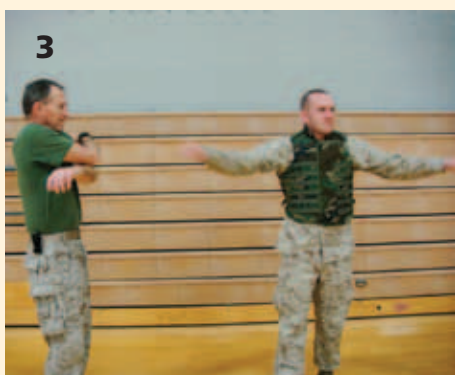
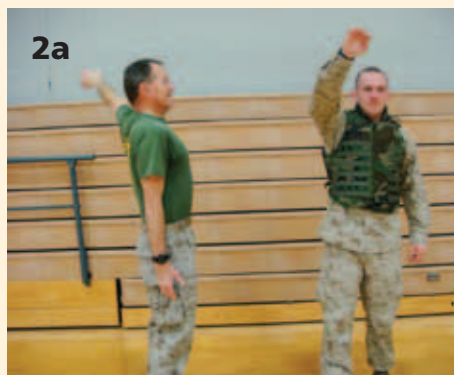
Perform one set of 6 to 10 reps for each dynamic stretch

- Forward arm circles — both arms (Figure 1)
- Backward arm circles — one arm at a time (Figure 2a-2b)
- Horizontal cross-overs — both arms (Figure 3)
- Vertical cross-overs — both arms (Figure 4)
- Front-to-back arm swings — arms alternate (Figure 5)

HIPS

Perform one set of 6 to 10 reps for each dynamic stretch

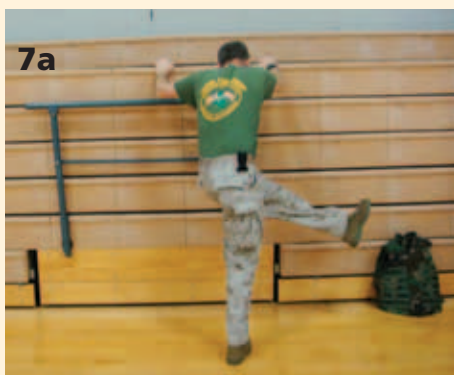
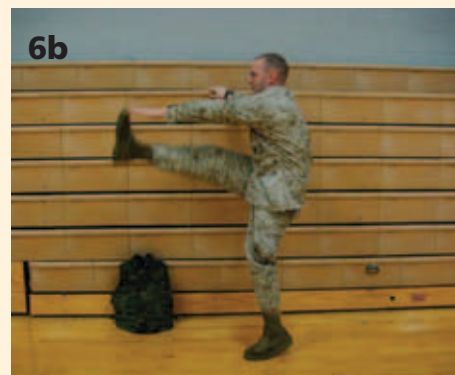
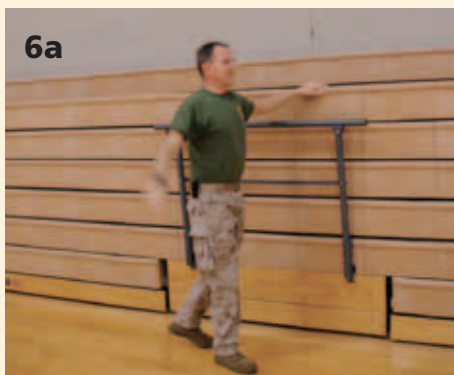
- Front swing kick — each leg (Figure 6a-6b)
- Side swing kick — each leg (Figure 7a-7b)
- Lateral hip shift — alternate sides (Figure 8a-8b)
- Stationary high knee walk (Figure 9)
- Stationary straight leg deadlift walk — alternate sides (Figure 10)
- Full squat stretch (Figure 11)
- Step lunge with half twist — alternate sides (Figure 12a-12b)



Stretching

There are two categories of stretching. One type is called *static stretch* and it involves placing muscle groups on stretch and holding them in that position for a selected period of time (usually 10 to 40 seconds). This type of warm-up stretching is not as effective for preparing the body for quick, violent movements and generating power.

Dynamic stretch involves the controlled movement of joints through their full range of motion. This type of stretching is extremely valuable to athletes and tactical athletes because it serves as mild activity to warm up the muscles as well as working them through their functional motions. The tempo of the movements should begin slowly and gradually increase in rate and amplitude (range) as the muscles loosen up. Extremely fast ballistic movements using the mass and momentum of the body part





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to force the muscles to stretch should be avoided because of the risk of soft tissue injury. The key to safe dynamic stretching is controlling the tempo of the movements and gradually increasing the range of motion. Dynamic stretching is a more appropriate method of preparing the body for intense physical activity.

The two areas of emphasis for dynamic stretch are the shoulders and hips. The shoulder is the most freely moveable joint in the body and is the focal point for initiating movements of the upper extremity. The hip joint plays the same role in initiating movements of the lower extremity. Maintaining optimum flexibility in the shoulders and hips ensures improved potential for mobility and power. Therefore, the focus of dynamic stretching should be on these joints.

The tactical warm-up routine is recommended for special teams in law enforcement. It may also be valuable to any law enforcement personnel who may deal with random physical confrontations. This warm-up requires no equipment, it can be done anywhere in a limited amount of space and it takes very little time. These stretches may be performed as part of a morning routine and the residual effects may last for several hours. It would be beneficial for special teams to employ dynamic stretches shortly before gearing up for a tactical mission. This may even be done at the operation site.

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About the author

Rick Regan is a physical training consultant. He has trained high school, college and professional athletes as well as special ops personnel for military and law enforcement organizations. As a training officer in the USAR, he has been involved in a variety of tactical and physical training assignments. He can be reached at regaly@charter.net.

