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## What to Do After a Workout

*When Exercise is Over, the Work Isn't*

Many of us have a great pre-workout and workout routine. We drink plenty of water before and during exercise, warm up, stretch, work the entire body, and even get in some cardio training as well. Then, after the last exercise, we promptly head back to the locker room, change, and journey home.

What so many out there do not realize is the importance of what you do after you work out. You may have done the majority of the work, but how you treat your body in the minutes and hours after you exercise has a direct effect on muscle soreness, muscle strength and growth, and staying hydrated.

### Cool Down

After your last exercise, your workout is not over. The first thing you need to do is cool down. Even if running was all that you did, you still should do light cardio for a few minutes. This brings your heart rate down at a slow and steady pace, which helps you avoid feeling sick after a workout. Walking on a treadmill for five minutes is a good and easy way to cool down.

### Stretch

Then, you should stretch again. This is one of the most important things you can do. After a workout, muscles naturally contract. Stretching again prevents them from shrinking. It allows your muscles to rebuild, growing bigger and stronger, and thus allowing you to get the full benefit from your efforts.

Stretching after exercise also relaxes your muscles, helps speed circulation to joints and tissues, and helps removal of unwanted waste products, thereby reducing muscle soreness and stiffness. Add mental sharpness and you have all the reasons you need to make sure stretching comes not only before, but after every workout as well.

### Drink Water

Even when you are actually done exercising, you need to keep replenishing your fluid levels. It's recommended that you drink another 2-3 cups within two hours after you have finished. Then, drink water regularly afterwards. You may not feel thirsty anymore, but you still need to replenish yourself to avoid getting dehydrated.

### Refuel

Eating is one of the last, but one of the most important, items to do after a workout. You have not only burned hundreds of calories and lost carbohydrates, but you have also actually torn your muscles. You need to repair your muscles and boost your energy level, and you need to do it fast. It's recommended that you eat within 90 minutes of your workout, but the sooner the better. Look for foods that are packed with complex carbohydrates and high in protein. A perfect example is a tuna sandwich on whole wheat bread.

The carbs will re-energize your body, while slowly turning into calories - so you have plenty of time to burn them before they turn to fat. The protein helps repair your muscles, so they grow stronger while your body rests until the next workout.

Next time you put down the dumbbells and think your work is done, remember these after-workout necessities to maximize your efforts and get the most out of exercising.