



MOBILE DEALS

Good mobility can improve just about every facet of performance in the gym or on the pitch, helping you become quicker, stronger and built to last

You made it to the gym. It's leg day. You have an hour before you need to get finished and back to work. Time is precious. You circle your arms, touch your toes, check yourself in the mirror, look at your phone and head to the squat rack.

That might be all the mobility work you do before getting under the bar and loading your body up with some weight. And why not? You work hard. You're looking good. And you're not injured. You don't need to waste time on the optional extras.

Except, if you've got even a passing interest in getting stronger, or building a body to stand the test of time, you really do.

Dr Kelly Starrett founded the site MobilityWOD – now The Ready State – and has written two New York Times bestsellers on the subject. He believes men don't do enough mobility because it hasn't been communicated in the right way.

Reflecting on his own time as a national athlete, when a physical therapy intern suggested he was missing full shoulder mobility, Dr Starrett says, "I was thinking, *Who cares? I'm smashing it, I'm a great athlete and I don't have shoulder pain.* That's what I'd been taught: to wait around until something hurts. Instead of understanding that I wasn't being as effective as I could be and that by not having a full range of motion, I was leaving wattage and poundage on the table."

So, while you might be ticking along nicely and making progress, regular mobility work will improve your lifting and make your time in the gym even more effective. >>

“Working on and improving mobility is about maximising your output and the results from your time in the gym”



tension from and improving when you get your foam roller working on your aching muscles.

Mobility for muscle

A meta-analysis, published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports*, found clear evidence that full range of motion training led to significantly greater muscle adaptation and size increase.

“Whatever your training goals are,” says Ilano, “whether you’re trying to gain muscle or improve body composition, if you can’t achieve certain positions that make the exercise optimal, you won’t be getting the most out of it.”

So, working on and

improving mobility is about maximising your output and the results from your time in the gym. If poor mobility in your shoulder prevents you from performing your overhead press correctly, you will not be getting the most from that particular exercise. You should think of your mobility work as a power-up for your strength and conditioning work.

“I want you to have more ankle mobility, so you can push harder into the ground during your deadlift,” says Dr Starrett. “When we can return your range of motion and your control of that range, then we can return

your power and your potential to get stronger.”

Mobility for speed and performance

It’s not just in weight training that you’ll see the benefits of mobility work, though. Dr Starrett has worked with Ben Rosenblatt, the England football team’s strength and conditioning coach, and Nic Gill of the New Zealand All Blacks. In these situations, he is looking to improve players’ abilities to generate power, change direction and accelerate.

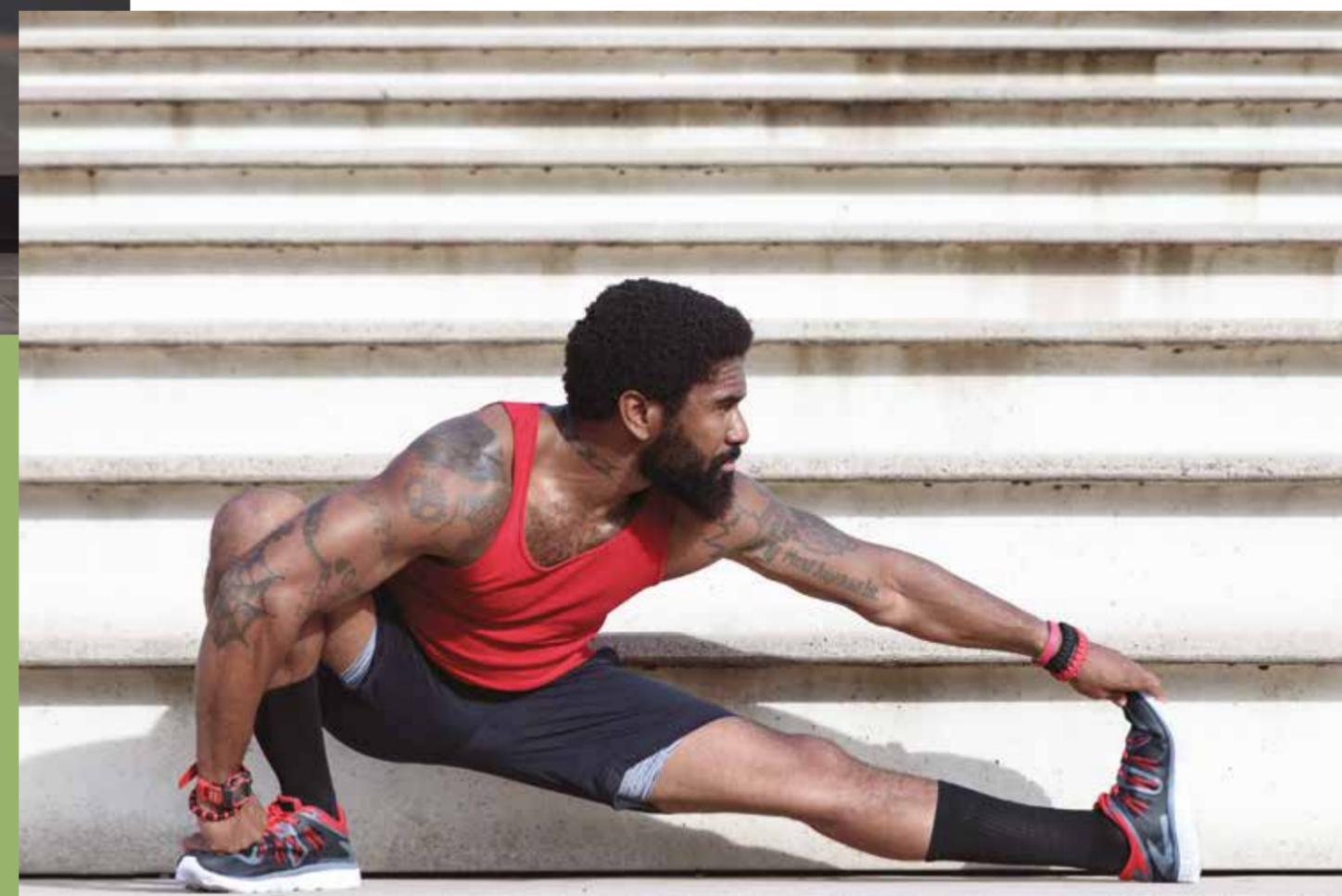
“Nobody cares what normative hip flexion is,” Dr Starrett says, “but if I say, ‘This will allow you to jump further, run faster, or pedal faster,’ then you have some

convincing reasons to improve your hip mobility.”

He gives the example of pre-match warm-ups: “Footballers warm-up the way they do for a reason. They are using specific dynamic stretches to reach these optimal ranges of motion to improve their performance.”

Ilano, too, recognises that mobility work should be sport-specific. He practices Brazilian jiu jitsu, and works on mobility with a lot of martial artists.

“You can clearly see that if you have more mobility it will buy you time,” he says. “If they get you in an arm lock and you have >>



Flexibility vs. mobility

The common understanding is that flexibility is the ability to stretch a muscle passively (i.e. with assistance). So, if you’re on your back and someone picks up your right foot to stretch and gently push your leg towards you, the point at which the leg stops moving indicates your flexibility.

Mobility, on the other hand, is how far you can move a joint through its range of motion under your body’s own control

(i.e. without any external influence). If you lie on your back and use the strength of your muscles to lift your right leg, flexing at the hip, the point at which you couldn’t move the leg anymore would be considered your active range of motion – your mobility.

So, good mobility requires that you are able to reach a position and hold it yourself for a period of time. In this example, mobility means it’s not enough to just have flexible hamstrings,

glutes and calves: you also need good fluidity of movement in the hip joint and strong hip flexors to hold the leg in position.

While mobility is not the same as flexibility, it’s not possible to see the two as completely unrelated. Confused? Jarlo Ilano, physical therapist and trainer with GMB Fitness, explains it this way: “Flexibility can’t be separated from mobility. You need flexibility to get into certain mobile positions – the squat, for example.”

You need a degree of flexibility in your quads, hip

flexors and ankle joints so you can squat comfortably and correctly.

“Mobility is also about tissue health and the ability of tissues to express range of motion, as well as the control to express that good range of movement,” adds Dr Starrett.

Part of that tissue health relates to the myofascia: the connective tissue that surrounds and contains all the muscles of your body. This is the tissue you are massaging, releasing

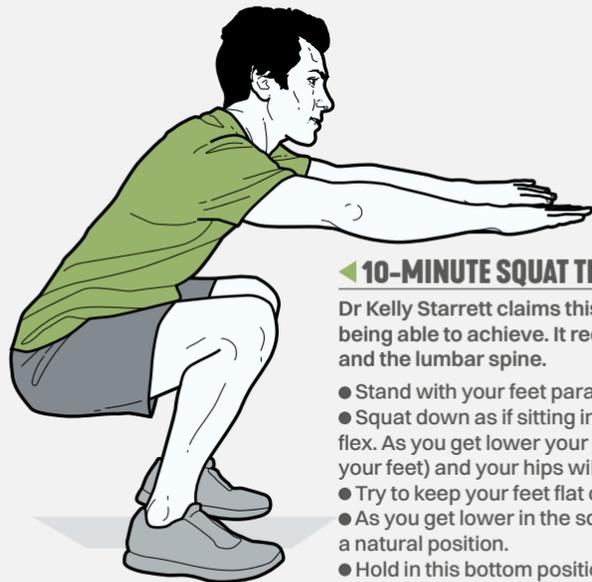
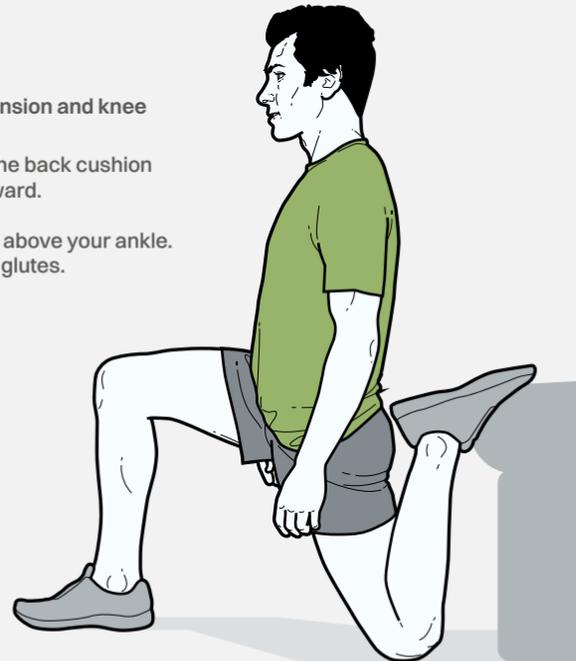
MOBILITY INDICATORS

Use these three mobility tests to see where you may have issues in reaching full range of motion. These are your opportunity to find out where you need to improve your mobility, so you can apply your time in the gym to the best effect

COUCH STRETCH ▶

This is a great stretch to see where your hip extension and knee flexion weak points are.

- Bend your left knee and place your shin along the back cushion of a couch (or a chair) with your toes pointed upward.
- Keep your left thigh in line with your body.
- Place your right foot in front, aligning your knee above your ankle.
- Elongate your spine and engage your core and glutes.
- Keep your hips square.
- Hold for at least 45 seconds.
- Switch sides.



◀ 10-MINUTE SQUAT TEST

Dr Kelly Starrett claims this is a posture we should all be aiming towards being able to achieve. It requires good mobility at the hips, knees, ankles and the lumbar spine.

- Stand with your feet parallel, hip-width apart and toes facing forward.
- Squat down as if sitting in a chair. Your hips, knees and ankles will start to flex. As you get lower your knees will travel over your toes (stay in line with your feet) and your hips will drop over your heels to maintain your balance.
- Try to keep your feet flat on the ground.
- As you get lower in the squat, allow your lumbar spine to flex into a natural position.
- Hold in this bottom position for ten minutes (or as close as you can manage).

APLEY SCRATCH TEST ▶

This is a test used by many physios to diagnose shoulder mobility issues. It tests internal and external rotation, as well as adduction and abduction at the shoulder joint.

- Reach your right arm above your head, with palm facing forward.
- Bend at the elbow and place your right palm on your left shoulder blade. If possible, see if you can place the hand between your two shoulder blades.
- Reach your left arm behind you, with palm facing inwards.
- Bend at the elbow and place the back of your left hand on your right shoulder blade. See if you can place the hand between your two shoulder blades.
- Try to touch the fingers of your right hand and left hand together.



Illustrations: Peter Liddiard



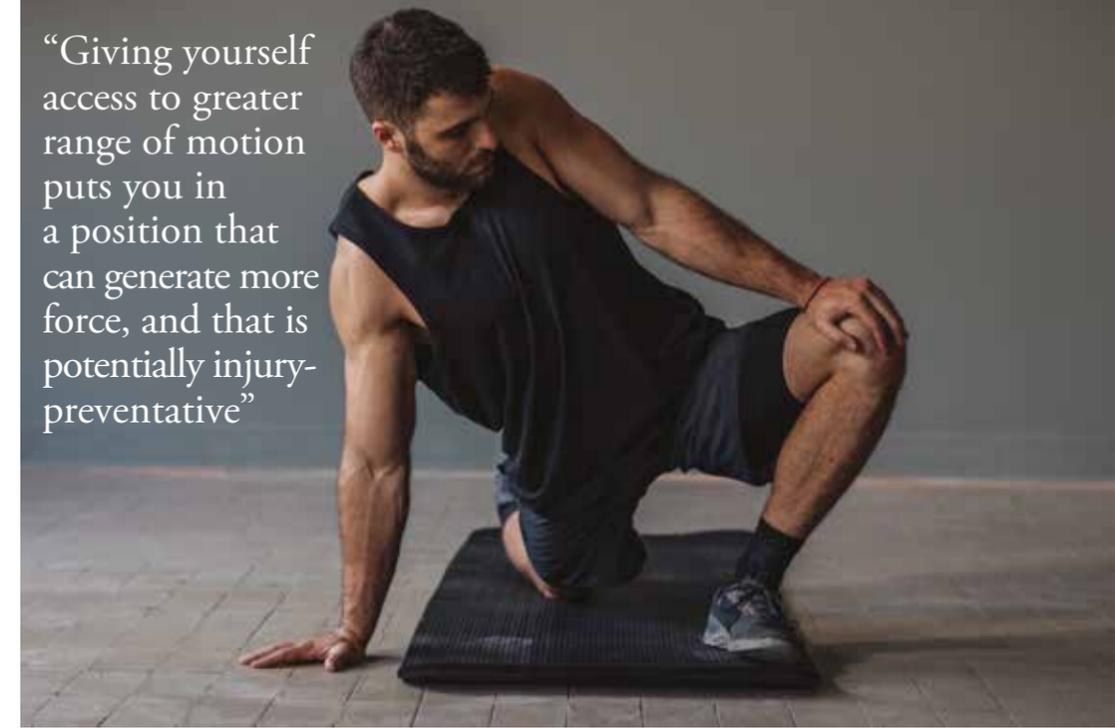
limited shoulder mobility, they barely have to move you before you have to tap out.”

It follows, then, that you should be looking to improve your mobility to reach these optimal ranges of motion, so you can increase your effectiveness on the football pitch, on your bike, or on the mat.

Mobility and injury

There is evidence to support the fact that mobility can prevent injury, but there is still some debate among fitness professionals, so it would be too simplistic to apply this as a rule across the board. But you can be sure that in sport-specific cases, mobility will help you. For example, if you play football, greater mobility of your hips and ankles should lead to less chance of injury. A study carried out over two seasons, and published in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, showed that using mobility training led to a significant decrease in muscle injuries (strains and tears).

“Giving yourself access to greater range of motion puts you in a position that can generate more force, and that is potentially injury-preventative”



In the weights room, mobility training will help to prevent injuries further down the line, too, as Ilano explains:

“If you have an existing mobility restriction and you continue lifting, you are cementing that issue. These things don’t tend to improve; they [muscles, tendons and joints] tend to get tighter. It’s an accumulation over time.”

In a similar way, Dr Starrett suggests that mobility training and greater awareness of your movement

can help: “Giving yourself access to greater range of motion puts you in a position that can generate more force, and that is potentially injury-protective. Mobility is the benchmark of durability.”

How to train mobility

Dr Starrett is a strong believer that you should be maximising your time in the gym. “If you’re pressing overhead today,” he says, “let’s work on your overhead position, let’s

address the tissues that may be restricting you.”

He recommends that you use a dynamic mobility warm-up specific to the area of the body you are training during that session.

It’s not about addressing whole-body mobility each time you get to the gym. Instead, it’s about applying the right mobility warm-up for the training session you have planned for that day. That way you are maximising the precious time you have in the gym.

When it comes to foam rolling, to release tension and improve tissue health, save that for later in the day.

“We have far better adherence with our clients if they are doing foam rolling at the end of the day,” says Dr Starrett. “Perhaps they are watching TV and they can sit on the floor with their foam roller, and then think, *What’s sore today?* They can then spend ten minutes working on that. This way, we found people had healthier tissues, less pain and fell asleep more quickly – while keeping their gym time intact.”



MOBILITY MOVES

Jarlo Ilano and his colleagues at GMB Fitness have pulled together a range of exercises that cover top-to-toe mobility

UPPER-BODY MOBILITY ▼

PRONE BENT-ARM CHEST STRETCH

This stretch targets the chest and front of the shoulder.

- Begin in the prone position (on your stomach), with one hand on the floor and your elbow bent, and the other arm extended straight on the floor.
- With your bent arm, press into the floor and shift your weight towards your other hand, to initiate a stretch in your chest.
- Take your time moving in and out of the stretched position, and try to deepen the stretch with each rep.
- Once you're comfortable in this position, move in and out of the stretch 10 times, then hold for 30 seconds.
- Repeat this sequence for 3 rounds, then repeat on the opposite side.



CLASPED HANDS EXTENSION

This stretch allows you to work on shoulder extension and helps you work against that rounded posture we tend to find ourselves in.

- Start in a seated position. You can sit on the floor with your legs crossed or out in front of you. You can also sit in a chair without a back, if that's more comfortable.
- Clasp your hands behind your back and then straighten your elbows. Sit up with a tall posture and pull your arms up and back as far as you can. When doing this stretch, focus on squeezing your shoulder blades together.
- Move in and out of the stretch 5 times, then hold for 15-30 seconds on your final rep.



LOWER-BODY MOBILITY ▼

KNEELING LUNGE

As you lean into this stretch, you want your knee to be over your toes as opposed to your shin being straight up and down.

- Get into a lunge position, with your knee and foot about hip-width apart from the elevated leg.
- Keep your chest tall and hips square.
- If you need more of a stretch, you can pull your back knee up off the ground.
- Make sure your hips are square with your upper body, and you'll be in the right position.
- You can also adjust your back leg to make sure you feel a good stretch in your hip flexors.
- Once you find a good position that is challenging, yet comfortable, sink into the stretch for 30 seconds per leg. Do 3 rounds for each side.



PIGEON STRETCH

In addition to opening up the hips, the pigeon stretch can help you work on your hamstring and spine flexibility.

- Start with your front knee bent to a 90-degree angle. You can adjust your back knee to what you're comfortable with, keeping it bent or extending it.
- Rock back and forth, rotating your rear hip towards your front heel, and then towards the back foot.
- Keep your chest up high, and only take the stretch as far as you can comfortably.
- You can enhance the stretch by straightening out your back leg, which puts you into the full pigeon pose, but only do what's comfortable.
- Set a timer for 30 seconds and work on opening your hip, then switch sides and set another timer for 30 seconds.
- You can repeat this stretch, alternating sides for 2 more rounds.



Words: Simon Sharman | Photography: Getty Images / GMB Fitness

SPINAL HEALTH AND BACK MOBILITY ▼

QUADRUPED SIDE BEND

This stretch targets your lattissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum and spinal erectors. It helps open up your back and gets you ready for torso rotation.

- Get into a kneeling position and stretch your hands out in front of you. If your quads are tight and they keep you from getting into a deep kneeling position, just sit back as far as you comfortably can.
- Move your hands to your right side, so they're at a 45-degree angle to your body, until you feel a nice stretch. Take the stretch further, if you can.
- Do 10 reps of this stretch, and then hold it for 30-60 seconds.
- Repeat this motion 3 times, then do the same on the opposite side.



QUADRUPED TORSO ROTATION

A lot of people struggle with spinal rotation, so this stretch will help you open up new ranges of motion.

- Get down on all fours, making sure your hands are directly under your shoulders and your knees under your hips.
- Move one forearm directly under your chest near the midline, and then place the back of your free hand on the small of your back.
- Now rotate your body toward the elbow and look upward to the ceiling. To stabilise your body, press down with your support elbow into the ground.
- Do 10 full repetitions, and hold the last one for 30-60 seconds.
- Do 3 rounds of this stretch, then repeat for the opposite side.

