

I have tight hamstrings and low back pain. Do I need to stretch?



Know Your Joints
Muscle and Joint Care
Suggestions

Hamstrings that lack range of motion is not a good thing. I know that some athletes it may help them with explosive power, but in general hamstrings that lack range of motion can affect the back. Most research backs this up. When your hamstrings are lacking range of motion they pull on your pelvis. They may make you round your lower back with bending over to pick something up. This puts a lot of tension on the muscles in the lower back, which can lead to muscle strain and possible compression between the joints. This can cause a variety of things to happen which may result in disc problems and/or sciatica. The answer to this problems sounds like stretching, but it may not be the total answer. **You may need strengthening.** It could be the deep muscles in your hip that are weak which the hamstrings are compensating for. These deep hip muscles give stability to the hip. If they are weak the hamstring can take over and in doing so may become tight from being over worked. What some physical therapists and trainers suggest is strengthening of the muscles around the hip including the deep muscles of the hip as well as the hamstrings. Stretching can be done also to give some relief, but it is the strengthening that I truly feels matters. One exercise I truly feels helps is the resisted clam shells.

What if you have good range of motion of the hamstring and still feel tight? Feeling of tightness is a perception. Some people have normal range of motion in the hamstring and they still feel tight. In many cases tightness is a sign that you are weak in an area as mentioned. It could be the muscle that is tight or it could be a muscle that the tight muscle is doing the work for is weak. Stuart McGill's research has also found that in many cases, tight hamstrings are a related symptom of back issues rather than a cause. Interestingly, hamstrings often decrease in tightness as back pain subsides. That being said, when one hamstring is tighter than the other, the asymmetry has had mild influences on back pain, particularly in athletes. Learning proper movement patterns for daily activities such as tying your shoes as well as other specific exercises that do not work the hamstring may help relieve the pain.