



How to Do the Splits

Flexibility Training and Breathing Tricks

If you're working on the full splits and you're not making progress, this guide is for you. While flexibility gains can last for years, they are often negatively affected by repetitive stress sports, or weightlifting. That's exactly what happened to me when I started running recently – my splits form went backwards. Thankfully, I quickly returned to my old training protocol and the splits came back fast. I'll share my preferred practice with you here.

The splits are a compound stretch meaning you have multiple big muscle groups involved at the same time, including your hamstrings and hip flexors. When you do the splits your nervous system sends signals to your legs to fight the stretch – worried that you will overstretch and get injured. Here, I'll share a stretching technique and a breathing practice to help you override that muscular response and help you to improve your splits form.



Breathe to Relax

Inside your muscle bellies, there are sensory organs called muscle spindles that sense the speed and depth of stretch. When they sense potential danger, these spindles send a signal to your spinal cord and your nervous system responds by contracting your muscles. This is your body's myotatic stretch reflex at work, and it's extremely forceful during the full splits.

To turn off this response, inhale through our nose for 1-2-3-4, and then exhale with a "ha" sound through your mouth for 8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1. This slow, resonant breath with a prolonged exhale stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system and helps to dampen the stretch reflex.



PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation)

PNF is an advanced stretching technique which involves contracting and relaxing the muscles. Inside your tendons lies a proprioceptive organ called the golgi tendon (GTO). Your GTO senses any excessive force on the tendon, and when it feels there is a real risk for it to become torn or damaged, it inhibits your muscles, so they turn weak and loose. By using PNF to overwhelm your lower limbs with contractile force, when you release your GTO inhibits and loosens the muscles, which can make a huge difference in the splits.

- Straddle a pile of pillows (try couch pillows) with blocks or books at either side
- Set a timer for 5 minutes
- Lift out of the stretch and contract your legs so hard that they shake for 1-2-3-4-5
- Relax and exhale through your mouth, then inhale through your nose for 1-2-3-4
- Exhale mouth with a “ha” sound for 8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1
- Repeat the contract / relax cycle each minute until done
- Remove the pillows if and when you’re ready
- Aim for a 7/10 intensity

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