



Episode 81 – Martial Arts Warmups | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey what's up everybody, we're back for another episode of [whistlekickmartialartsradio](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). This time it's episode 81 and this is the only place you are the best conversations about the martial arts. Today were going to talk about how to properly warm up and cool down for a workout. I'm the founder here whistlekick but I'm better known as your host Jeremy Lesniak. Whistlekick if you didn't know makes the world's best sparring gear and excellent apparel and accessories for practitioners and fans of traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome our new listeners, I thank all of you that are listening again. If you're not familiar with our products you can learn more or buy over at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). All of our past podcast episodes show notes and a whole bunch more are on a completely different site and that's [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). From either of those websites, you could sign up for newsletter you really should we offer exclusive content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about the upcoming guests for the show. Like I said today's episodes all about how to warm up and get ready for work out and at the end we'll talk a little bit about cool down.

So what is a warm up? When people talk about warm-ups, let's just get on the same page we talk about warming up, we're talking about that part of that period of time before you actually get into the meat of your work out, before you start training your forms or your sparring or your basics that piece that goes from zero to maybe not quite 60 but zero to some point where you're ready to go and I think everybody at least inherently recognizes the importance of warming up but not everybody does it. So why should you warm up? And there really are a few main reasons the first one is to reduce the risk of injury. If you just jump into a work out whether it's martial arts workout or any other kind of workout you're release and setting yourself up for if not failure from injury but at least from not getting as much out of it as you could and by that I mean you've really got a set your your body up especially are your cardiovascular system. You've gotta get that ready for the hard work that you're gonna do because if you don't the first portion of your workout is going to be spent getting your body into that state and of course, a warm-up is designed to do that whereas the rest of your workout is expecting you to already be there and for some of you out there that might be a little bit younger, you might be wondering why is this so important? I remember thinking that in my teens and in my early 20s, I am now knocking on the door for 40 and I completely understand the importance. The older you get the more nagging injuries you have, the more important warming up becomes. And I'm also gonna throw out there to the younger folks, the more diligent you are about warming up, the less you're going to need to warm up as you age. Yes this is something like anything else, you can condition your body into. Now when I talk about the importance of warm ups with others one of the questions I get is, what if my martial arts class doesn't offer a good warm-up and I'm gonna be blunt, most martial arts classes do not offer a very good warm up some offer a warm up and it seems to correlate with the length of the class. Classes that are 90 or 90 minutes or two hours seem to have better warm-ups because the instructors are more willing to spend that time but for a class that is 45 or 60 minutes, they often spend very little time on warming up and that's either because they don't understand the importance or they expect that you do it on your own.



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Now if you're one of these people that has a class that doesn't spend a lot of time on warm-up it's important that you make that time available yourself. Get to class early spend a few minutes on your own go over some of these things as best you can with the space and time that you have and really set yourself up for success. I can't think of a better way to express what a warm-up is other than it is preparing your body for success and receiving the most amount of benefit from your martial arts training. As I hinted before, the more time you spend warming up effectively, I don't know if I want to say the less important it becomes but the more tolerant your body will be for skirting over a little bit you know, maybe not quite putting a hundred percent of the effort in that you should maybe your body needs a 15 minute warm-up now, but if you spend a lot of time over the next say six months doing those 15 minute warm-ups, maybe your body suddenly will be, not suddenly, will gradually become more tolerant of let's say a 10 minute warm-up. So the way I see it there really four parts to an effective warm-up. You've got low risk cardio, joint mobility, intensifying cardio and flexibility. I'm gonna break down all those in a second but we're really talking about a minimum of five minutes not each but combined and I think any martial arts class can find five minutes to spend the time to give the students an effective warm up if you are an instructor or school owner and this is an area of expertise for you to listen in do some research it is critical.

One of the things that I, I'm gonna underscore a couple times, is that flexibility is where a lot of us think of for warm up and heard I just mentioned three other things that come before flexibility and flexibility is the piece that you know as martial artist, we seem to hone in on because it allows us to take higher and do things like that that are really exciting for us. So were prone to spending a lot of time on flexibility if we have that available but then we have just as much risk cooling down now we have all these loose, somewhat cold muscles were expecting that everything is still up our heart rate elevated and then we jump into a class and you just want to watch out for that so we'll talk about that more us in a little bit. So what is low risk cardio, the place that you really want to start out? That's the first thing you should be doing when you step out on the floor, its jumping jacks for some of us it might be push-ups, it could be bodyweight squats, it could be sit-ups. Basically is anything to get your heart rate going a little bit up to more than a little bit, to a lot but doesn't risk some kind of injury. So, I said push-ups for some people some people have shoulder issues, some people need their shoulders to warm up before they can do push-ups well. Jumping jacks are probably the safest one that I know and if you do jumping jacks with some intensity they can warm you pretty well. For other people jumping or running things like that, anything is to get you going but the key is that it's gotta be safe. It's gotta be something that you can do and as an instructor to someone leading the class leading the warm up it's important to know your students and you know this might be a time that is individualized. You might set people on their own for 60 seconds, 90 seconds to minutes to say hey pick one of these three movements and don't stop doing them do them slowly, do them your best, just keep going okay.

Joint mobility. That's really taking all of your joints all away from your neck all the way down through and going through your full range of motion, not necessarily the full range of motion for the joint because again we all have personal differences in what our bodies can handle you might have sticky



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points or you might have an injury, you might have something that needs more warm up before you can really get going with a full work out or with something more intense even in working in joint mobility. And the best way think about joint mobility circles. You know, I'm making circles for my wrists as I'm talking right now making circles with my ankle right now as I'm talking things like that and they should be easy it's not something you're forcing through a range of motion but it's critical to get those fluids moving in the joints before we go on to our next step. Joint mobility is also a great time to take notice of what your body is telling you. If you're feeling like a particular joint is a little rough, maybe it's Thursday or Friday you've been training 3 or 4 days that week and you know something's talking to you? You know it's real technical term right, but I think nobody knows when talking about. If there's something that is happening within your body because this joint mobility phases a little bit slower, it gives you the opportunity to focus on different body parts and see okay this is a part that I need to come back to during my cooldown or maybe I need to spend some extra time over the weekend or whatever handling it.

Now that third phase I mentioned is intensifying cardio and I know that sounds really intimidating. But basically what that just means is you're going to do something the brings your cardiovascular system up that as you get into that phase and deeper into that phase it's going to become a little more intense. So maybe that's moving from jumping jacks to high knees to jumping front kicks and something like that. Jumping jacks are pretty easy high knees are a little bit more challenging, jumping front kicks could be even more challenging especially if you're trying to jump high. We're trying to start our body off with something that's easy and move to something that really gets a little bit of a sweat going get your heart rate really moving. And I think one of the keys here especially if it's a class we're concerned with the length of time that we have available, is that you really can incorporate a lot of martial arts into this phase. I've mentioned on the show before my love for kneeling front kicks, 10 kneeling front kicks on each leg will bring almost everybody to a point of I don't wanna say pain, for some people is a painful movement but at the very least it's a very tiring movement to stand up with one leg and throw a kick and then come back down in a controlled fashion.

So after this intensified cardio phase where it flexibility and flexibility is another word for stretching why do we stretch. And there is really two main reasons that we stretch. The first is to reduce the risk of injury and the second is to increase performance and another way of saying increasing performance is to increase the range of motion. That's the ability of your joints or to move in a particular direction for a particular distance. I'm getting kinda nerdy here but why we want to reduce risk of injury, that's pretty easy, nobody wants to get hurt. Why do we want to increase range of motion? The more range that we have within our joints the more capable we have, the capability we have of doing things. If I can kick above my head I don't have to kick above my head I can kick anywhere from the ground up to above my head if I can only kick to my knee, my ability to kick my range that I can kick is obviously limited and as martial artist were generally looking for some diversity, not just in our training but in our toolset. What we can do the things, the movements that we can perform and having better range of motion. As to that, when we talked about joint mobility I mentioned that as thinking about it as circles, think about



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your flexibility is straight lines are trying to move your whatever your foot, your hand, your shoulder in some particular street line most of the time and just a good way to think about it, that's how I think about it. Now if stretching and flexibility is not you're jam, if that's something that you really don't fully understand there's a ton of resources out there, I'm gonna look for a couple and put them in the show notes. Things that seem like good primers but you almost can't find bad resources out there, especially if you have a basic understanding of the body. Bottom line and any stretching resource you find should support these points and if they don't I'm gonna encourage you to discard them because we don't know what else they're getting wrong. Stretching should not hurt, it should be uncomfortable. There is a big difference. If stretching hurts, you're running the risk of injury. Dynamic stretching or ballistic stretching, I was first exposed to that in martial arts it something that at the time traditional science said was absolutely horrible but over the last few years we're starting to learn hey now this ballistic stretching if done properly is actually a good idea and I think the way that that's implemented martial arts classes that most people are used to would be raising your leg in a straight motion, you know a straight leg sort of a front kick up in front, this one of those rare times I wish our show was video, or out to the side or to the back and doing that smoothly not super slow just enough that you can get some momentum from the movement and not holding it so again were not going to the point of pain were just trying to encourage our muscles to loosen up and ballistic stretching is a great job of that. Ballistic stretching can also be an opportunity to keep your heart rate up and keep moving after that intensified cardiovascular piece so our heart rate doesn't completely drop off while we stretch. Then you can mix it up you can move around, be creative I think it's important to modify your stretching periodically do different things in different ways because the more you do that the more it's gonna encourage your body to let go. I mean, that's really what we're asking about to do and say hey let go this part here that is kinda sticky or tighter however you want to describe it, so I can kick here or punch here or move in this way or whatever it is.

So how long should a warm-up take? I think if you're really, really tight on time you can do a barely effective warm-up in about five minutes. Really should be working for about 15 minutes before you get into anything intense and I'm gonna say that applies and in most exercise settings whether it's weightlifting or running or martial arts. Now, I'm not okay just call myself an expert any of these fields but of course the place that I'm the most comfortable, the thing that I know the most about is martial arts so I'm pretty confident in saying that five minutes is really on the short end and a good solid 15 minute warm-up if done properly really sets everybody up for success. So how would you break that out, if it's a five minute I would spend about a minute on that low risk cardio those jumping jacks things like that. If we've got 15 minutes I'll bump that up to about two minutes. Joint mobility same time breakout a minute out of five or two minutes out of 15. Now that intensified cardio this is where it starts to change, 90 seconds out of five minutes. If you've got 15 minutes you can afford to spend five minutes that gives you a great opportunity to start easy and maybe spend that last 60 or 30 seconds going fairly hard getting a good sweat and really getting your heart rate going cause at that point that's weird and have the most benefit from your flexibility work which 90 seconds to round out those five minutes or if



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you've got 15 I would spend six minutes there. Your heart rates up your sweating your body is warm and that's where it's gonna be the most receptive to stretching. To the flexibility work. Now if you do spend six minutes on flexibility really if you spend more than I'd say two or three minutes on some stretching, don't just jump right into a hard workout spent a couple more minutes just kinda bringing your heart rate back up and getting warm.

You know it's just as much injury prevention as it is anything else. You know, I have seen too many people start the first 5-10-30 minutes of martial arts class off really slowly because they're just trying to get into a groove. And a lot of that can be shortened or even eliminated from a proper warm-up. The part where I see people get hurt the most is when they get through a good warm-up and then they cool off a lot without realizing it. You know and that's you can cool off while you're still sweaty and I think that's important to realize. So if you're on the fence, if you're unsure have a cool off too much just you know, do another 10 push-ups, do another 15 squats or something. Just err on the side of caution it's better to be a little tired at the end of the workout than it is to get hurt and not be able to train for who knows how long.

So there's warm-ups so real quick let's talk about cool downs. Cooling down is really the best opportunity to stretch the end of class, you put a bunch of time in, in theory you are more warmed up, you were more loose, more sweaty your body is more receptive to that flexibility work than it was at the beginning of your class, at the end of that warm-up phase. So, cooling down great time to do that, that low risk cardio or some other cardio at a lighter pace that's really a good time to work that work into that cool down, maybe you want to do that especially if we're coming off something intense like a bunch of rounds of sparring, something similar. Maybe you want to do that before you get into the stretching. The more movement that you're doing without really high intensity, that kinda moderate to lower pace, that's gonna mean less soreness or less risk of soreness depending on what you've done. I know a lot of people that do intensive exercise are used to this, you know they might go off for you know 5-6 mile run and they may ended you know, half-mile of walking you know something like that. I know a lot of the accepted theory behind here is flushing out lactic acid and there is research that disproves that but it's actually a great visual if we think about it that we generate that work and that work as lactic acid or however you want to think about it, in your body and as we bring the intensity of the work down, it can move back to wherever place it came from. Now if your class doesn't organize a good cooldown, there's nothing wrong with stick around a few minutes after class if you have the opportunity for not getting kicked out, if you have the physical space, spend a good five minutes, maybe 10 minutes on a cooldown. Work on some of the flexibility maybe notice what you can do with those points in your body, that were talking you during your warm up? Those sticky points I told you remember especially during that joint mobility phase? You know work on that and I bet if you do, other people working to join you and who knows maybe it will become an organized thing with your class and everyone will thank you for that.

So what are your thoughts is there something about warm up or cool down that it we didn't talk about or you want to explain a little bit more? Do you have thoughts, things to add that you did we skimp over



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