



National Player & Coach Development Pathway

ROOKIE SOX

Under 13, 6 x Week Catching Programme

Emphasis for all young catchers should focus on speed, agility and good mechanics.



Catching Checklist

Emphasis for all young catchers should focus on speed, agility and good mechanics.

The checklist below is a guide for the local catching instructor.

<p>Dynamic stretching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routines over 15 - 20m – Player's take turns providing a different exercise each training. • Dynamic stretches require movement, such as running, jumping or kicking. • Finish off with quick feet & core drills 		
U13 Catcher	Key Coaching Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Players who have a Go for It attitude and who aren't afraid of the ball are best suited to catch
Warm Up	Get up a sweat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic stretching. Please refer to the back of the document
Throwing warm up Focus on Mechanics	Take your time Grip on seam Glove to Ear Transfer Body through the throw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually build up distance to long toss • 3-4 Fingers on Letter C seam or backwards C • Feel the seam • Over the top release giving backspin rotation • Upon release use your body to finish down on your throw.
Catching Setup		**Note Squat styles vary as per personal preference**



Squat

Get LOW

Good Target

- Low squat means easier for umpire to see over you
- Feet shoulder width or wider apart
- Heels off ground
- Trunk bends forward
- Glove arm extended offering a good target with fingers up
- Throwing hand protected.

Positioning:

- Wait until batter has taken position in batter's box before crouching

Get as close to the batter as you can (without causing interference).



Receiving

Catch the ball

Eyes Open

Arm Extension

- Attempt to catch the ball in the centre of body
- Arm Extension: Extend arm outwards so umpire has clear view of ball
- EYES OPEN, even when the batter swings and misses
- When receiving ground or dirt balls, keep head forward/down so eyes are looking at the ball

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch Ball into Glove and use “quiet hands” as you catch it (Don’t stab at the ball)
	Signals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Squat with knees closer together (in line with the edges of home plate) to help conceal signals. • Give Signals inside the thigh/crotch area • Glove hand is to be placed below the knee to block the view of the base coach, runners, and opposing team.
<p>Framing</p> 		<p>Framing Jargon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STICK IT: Extend arm outward towards ball and hold in firm position • QUIET HANDS: Do not stab at ball or shift ball to position that you think would be a strike • PALM TO PLATE: As you watch ball into glove, the palm of your glove hand should be facing the plate. i.e. Ball pitched outside, your palm should face the inside. A high ball pitched, palm should face down/low • WRIST CHECK: Similar to “Palm to plate.” Once ball is caught your wrist very slightly shifts in order for your palm to face the plate. This creates illusion that the pitch is moving toward the plate as a strike.
<p>Receiving Dirt Balls</p>	Blocking the ball	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately drop both knees down placing the glove in between them. Throwing hand is to be behind your glove hidden. • Bend your upper body over creating a “dome” so the ball will be directed downward if it hits your body • Keep eyes open and chin tucked into chest so you are watching the ball on the ground • You are using your body to keep the ball in

front of you, not trying to catch it. Catching the ball is a bonus

- With balls to our left or right, drop your knees at an angle to cut the ball off (see pictures). Failing to have the proper angle means the ball will not stay in front of you.



Throwing- pickoffs & stealing



Alert every pitch

Quick Pop Time

- Set up: Back pivot foot is slightly open
- Engage your legs more so you are more explosive to get out of the squat to allow for a quicker throw

Throwing Jargon & Key Points:

Pop Time: The amount of time it takes from the catcher receiving the ball to the defender catching the throw. The quicker the pop time the more likely you will throw the runner out

Quick Feet: Your feet pivot your body, so you are in line and side on with the target. There are 2 options:

- Quick pivot
- Drop step

These two styles both work but try both to see which is quicker and more accurate for the player.

Glove to Ear: Once the ball is caught your glove is to transition toward your ear so your throwing hand can meet it, allowing for a quicker transfer. Make sure your elbows are up as you do this so you are in a



strong and quick throwing position.

Backspin!

Use your body! Upon release of the ball, we are releasing downward to gain quicker backspin and to keep throw flat. Our body follows downward almost as if we are falling toward the ground.

A low one hop throw is more accurate and quicker than a rainbow. It's not just about arm strength, but the ability to put your whole body into the throw.

Quick pop time + body strength in throw + accuracy = perfect form!

In event of pickoffs to first or third base, make sure you move away from the batter, so you have a clear lane for your throw.



Tagging

Set up

Straddle the plate with feet on both sides giving the runner a lane to slide into. Make sure you are right above the plate and not in front of the plate (catcher's interference).

Catcher must have the ball in order to put the tag on. You cannot block the plate without the ball.

If the ball is wide, go after it and keep it in front of you.

Any throws in the dirt, use your body/gear to keep it in front of you.



Laying the tag

Keep centre of gravity low and stand on balls of your feet, leaning slightly forward.

Tag with 2 hands (preferably although not always possible).

Be ready to recover for any additional base runners.

Be tough and ready for someone to run into you. Defend your plate.

Fielding

Pass balls to fence

In the event ball gets passed you:

Turn same way as the ball.

Move quickly to the ball and try to set your feet up side on to your target (home plate) with the ball in the centre of your body.

The throw will be either an underarm forehand flick or a backhand flick depending on your positioning.

Aim for the receiver's glove which should be at knee height above the plate.



Bunts

Remember explosive and agile catchers are key to getting out from behind the plate.

Explode out toward the ball, angling your feet so that you are side on to your target in the throwing position when fielding the ball. Note for a right handed catcher, this is difficult when the ball is down the third base line.

For central and 1st base line bunts: get into the proper angle with your feet so you are ready to throw inside the diamond toward your target.

For 3rd base line bunts: Get to the ball quickly with a lower centre of gravity. Focus on quick feet in order to line yourself up with a throw similar to the throw for stolen bases.

When picking up the ball use your free hand for a still ball or side scoop using the side of your glove.



Pop Flies

Mask or no mask? Personal Preference!

Be quick up to move.

General rule: Turn body away from the batter in order to run to pop flies toward the back stop. (i.e. right handed batter, generally foul ball is moving behind and to the catcher's right)

If you cannot see ball with mask, take it off and throw away from you.

Teammates should be able to help you find the ball by communicating.

Catch with two hands just above your eyes.

Catching Attributes: Leadership, communication, and mental toughness



Leadership qualities ideal. Catchers are the eyes of the field and can see everything. Communication is key for this position, so make sure you talk to your defence at all times!

Communication with; pitcher, coach, field and umpire.

As catchers get older the mental side of the game becomes more difficult yet important. Understanding what the baserunners are doing at all times are extremely important in directing your team to make the right plays on the field.

In event of a mistake, catchers must remain calm and help the pitcher/team bounce back. Eyes are always on catchers, don't show or display negative body language/communication.

Week #1

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, bases, cones, pitchers, written checklist.

Start with:

1. Introduce players to 3 minute jog and choose 5 dynamic stretches for the players to do. Remember since we are catchers, we do all of this with our gear on! Add static arm stretches to finish off for 1-2 minutes along with some quick feet/core movements.
2. Start with throwing progression for around 5-7 minutes slowly increasing the distance. Focus on throwing fundamentals (proper grip, over the top throw, using body, flat).
3. Talk about pop time & mechanics for a quick pop time.
4. Set up to allow for each player to do 10 throwdowns, 5 x to second base and split the other five between 1st and 3rd base.
 - Tick off on your check list things each player needs to work on.

Quick Throw Drill:

Focusing on Quick release: Players are side-on to the fence. Player will be in a standing squat. Toss/pitch ball to player and they are to catch and release ball throwing it into fence as fast as they can, 10-15 x each player. Stress proper pop time mechanics to accomplish this.

Quick Pop Drill:

Focusing on transition from catching prior to throw. Toss/pitch ball to player as they are in standing squat. They are to quickly turn (quick feet) meanwhile moving their glove straight towards ear. Their free hand will grab the ball out of the glove and extend their arm outwards in the ready-to-throw position. Make sure they keep elbows up for this, so they are in a strong throwing position. Once they are in their ready-to-throw position, they are to release the ball behind them and repeat as fast as they can for 10-15 balls each. The focus is on the form of the transfer.



Quick Feet Drill

Set up 4 cones in a straight line spread about 1 meter apart next to bases and base path

Players are to start in a squat over the cone and perform quick feet transition in between the cones dropping back into their squat at the next cone and so on. Focus on the quick feet transition making sure they are side-on. Once they pass cones, they will receive a ball from the squat position at the base where they will make a throw to first. Continue to the end of line and repeat until each player has completed 10 throws.

Finish it off: Throwdowns to 2nd

Have half of your catchers at home plate while the other half are at 1st base.

Have a helper toss/pitch ball to catcher as they throw down to second (catchers at first base will be throwing to third performing the same drill)

Spend some time talking to each catcher while they are doing this, outlining points they are doing really well and critiquing if necessary.



U13 Week #1 Homework:

1. Give the catcher a copy of the checklist and let them tell you which ones they need to work on over the next week.
2. Ask them to throw 3 x during the week for approx. 20-30 minutes focusing on identified throwing points and to return to the next practice with the checklist.

Week #2

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, bases, cones, pitcher/helper, and written checklist.

Start with:

- Warm up as per week #1 with a 3 min jog, 6 x dynamic exercises, overhand throwing and long toss that the player has worked up a sweat.
- Check their grip – on the seam?
- Check Pop time and quick feet with throws.
- Is their long toss flat or a rainbow throw?

Checklist:

- Ask the catcher to tell you which points on the checklist they have been working on during the last week.
- Tick off the checklist and see if the catcher has shown any improvement on the ones they did for homework.
- Talk to the catcher and help them achieve some of the points on the checklist. It will take longer than one week to achieve everything so don't expect immediate results.
- Praise them for their effort.

Key Point Discussion for Fielding:

- How to set up your feet and body in order to make a throw to first. Mention that great catchers are not lazy and will get up from behind home plate to make the play. Stay low!
- Keep ball in front of you and to use gear to block any poorly thrown balls as this will come in handy in the drills for the day.
- Free hand or use glove to field bunt? See what they think and show them their options of free hand or side scoop.

Bunt Drill:

- Have one line at first and one line squatting at home while sitting behind catcher, toss a bunt out in front of them so they can field and throw to first. Have them follow throw and rotate lines.
- Tick off on your check list the items that need to be worked on.

Passed balls & Tags:

- Get players in a circle working on underarm and backhand flicks until they look ready to move on.
 - Aim for the knee and lay a tag down
- Set up one line catching at home and the other just in front of the pitcher's mound. Roll a passed ball to the fence so the catcher can get it and make the play. Meanwhile the line near the pitcher mound will straddle home plate ready to make the tag at home. You can break into two groups to do this. Rotate lines and repeat.

- Tick off on your check list items that need to be worked on.
- Is their body set up for the toss? Is the toss accurate at the knee? How are their tags?



U13 Week #2 Homework:

1. Take the checklist home and catch 3x this week for 20-30 min.
2. Continue to work on your throwing transition, pop time and accuracy. How many times can you hit your target out of 10?

Week #3

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, balls (tennis balls, whiffle balls, flexi balls), bases, cones, pitchers, written checklist.

Start with the same as week 1 & 2 with the full warm up routine:

Hopefully you should see some improvements with flat throws, quick pop time, spin, etc.

Pitchers & Catchers Warm up:

- Each Catcher will start warming up a pitcher until they are reasonably warm to start throwing at spots/corners.
- Note most pitchers of this age grade will not be perfect as hitting spots. As long as they can throw strikes, this should do.

Checklist:

Have catchers catch pitchers as they would in a game. Take a few minutes to look at each player's framing and stance. Write down what each player needs to improve on with the check list.

- Low to ground stance?
- Quiet hands or jabbing at the ball?
- Arm extended in centre of body at a distance where an umpire can see?
- Which way is palm facing on pitches?

Quick Framing and positioning Discussion:

Briefly bring player in to discuss key points.

- Palm to Plate technique with stiff arm and quiet hands
- Are you low enough?
- When do you set up for the pitcher and where is your body lined up in comparison to the plate?

Get catchers back with pitchers to continue receiving the ball as if in a game. Assist in their framing and receiving technique when necessary. Have all pitchers start with throwing outside for a few minutes, then inside, then low, then high (if possible).

Tennis/Whiffle Ball Frame:

Keep each catcher set up in front of their plate with no gloves, their pitcher only a couple meters in front. Pitchers will alternate tossing between inside and outside while catchers display proper setup and framing technique.

- Toss x15 inside
- Toss x15 outside

- Toss x15 high
- Toss x15 low

Is their arm extending out and are they catching in the middle of their body? Are they displaying correct palm to plate technique and quiet hands?

Closing Discussion:

- Why do we frame?
- What does this do for the pitcher?
- What does this do for the umpire?



U13 Week #3 Homework:

1. Work with a pitcher 1-2 x this week for 20-30 minutes, focusing on your framing and setup. Note a parent to help will do as well.
2. Throw long toss 3 x this week. How is the spin and your transfer?
3. Think about how to properly block a ball thrown in the dirt in preparation for next week.

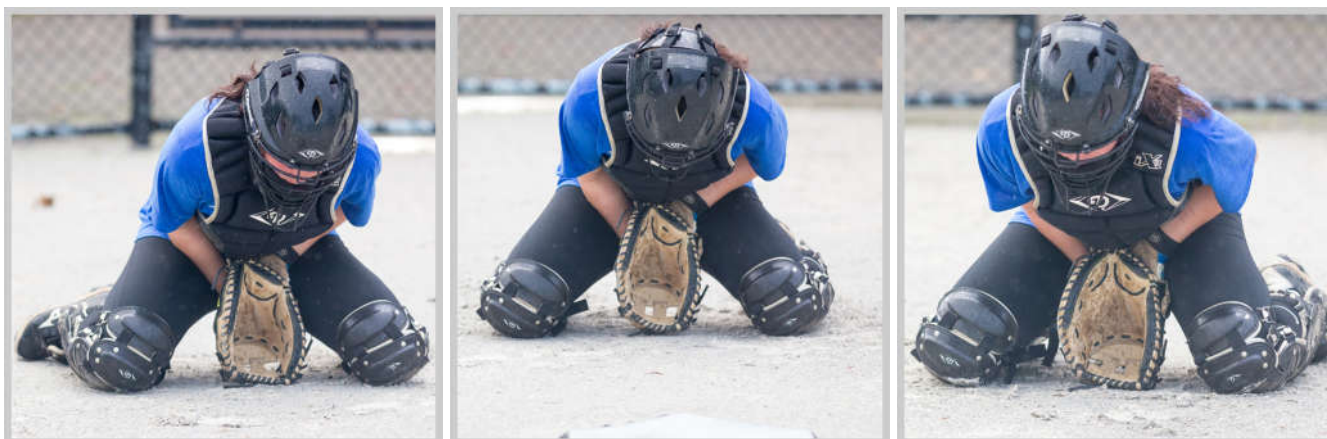
Week #4

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, whiffle balls/tennis balls, cones.

Warm up same as previous weeks. Make sure legs are warmed up.

Blocking Fundamentals:

- Discuss with players the mechanics of a proper block
- We want the catchers to keep ball in front, the object is not to “catch” the ball
- Have all players in a line in front of their home plate in their ready position. Every so often call “down” and see how each players form is. Adjust player’s positions where necessary
- Continue with a few more rounds having the catchers move and block to the imaginary pitches Verbal commands such as “Right, block, set, left, frame, set, block, set” can be used. Check the player’s feet to see if they are turning to the correct angle which is called.



Eyes Open Dome Drill:

- Get players into two groups of 3, set up in the blocking position already down on their knees
- Using whiffle balls or tennis balls, throw the ball simulating a dirt ball into the ground where it will bounce at the players chest protector
- Get the players used to keeping their body in front of the ball with their eyes open. NOTE most players will flinch or try to pull their head up which in turn keeps their body upright. This drill is trying to break that
- Do 3-4 rounds with a bucket of whiffle/tennis balls.

How many can you block?

- Get players into two groups of 3, each set up in front of their plate
- Using whiffle balls or tennis balls, throw the ball simulating a dirt ball into the ground where it will bounce at the players chest protector
- Get the players to drop down into the full block position; the goal is to keep the ball in front of you
- Do 3 rounds with a bucket of whiffle/tennis balls

- Have each player keep count of how many they have blocked correctly out of 10 in each round
- Repeat 1 last round of 10, this time informing players they will not all be in the dirt. Some will be straight, and they will have to frame! Count how many out of 10 they perform correctly.

Drop Down Race:

Stress importance of being quick and agile as a catcher. We want energetic catchers.

- Set up 5 cones spread 1 foot apart
- Split players into 2 lines. One on each side of cones
- Players are to race each other, starting in a squat and dropping their knees down at each cone as fast as they can
- Players will rotate to the end of the line. Do a few rounds and change teams in order to keep competition even.



U13 Week #4 Homework:

1. Perform some blocking drills 3 x this week with regular softballs. Either have someone toss some softballs to you in the dirt or work on how quickly you can drop to the ground in proper form (3 sets of 10)
2. Work on throwdowns 1-2 x this week in preparation for week 5. How many throws out of 10 can you accurately throw to second base? First base? Third?

Week #5

Watch the players catch in game situations.

Have all pitchers and catchers warm up, pitchers pitching and catchers focusing on fundamentals learned so far.

Set up an infield diamond with batters hitting and runners on base. Rotate catchers in and out. Some situations to work on include:

- Runner on first pick offs
- Throwdowns stealing to second
- Throwdowns Stealing to third
- Bunts
- Passed balls

Critique the catcher on the following points:

1. How does the catcher cope with the set up rules of the game?
2. How is their setup? Are they too high? Do they look nervous or confident?
3. How is their framing?
4. What's their body language and communication like? Are they talking to the infield or their pitcher?
5. What's the catcher's attitude like? Calm & confident or quiet & lacking in confidence?
6. Are they willing to put their body on the line, or do they look reserved? Are they willing to block if given the opportunity?

Take notes for each player and at the end of your game discuss individually on things they did well along with things that could use some improvement.



U13 Week #5 Homework:

1. Work with a pitcher or parent 3 x this week.
2. Each day work on throwing accuracy. How many out of 10 can you hit the target?
3. Frame 40 balls total, 10 x inside, 10 x outside, 10 x high, 10 x low
4. Block 30 balls, 10 x down middle, 10 x inside, 10 x outside. Make sure your angles are correct and eye is on ball!

Week #6

Putting it all together and communication.

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, pitchers, written checklist.

1. Warm up same as previous weeks

Communication Discussion:

Who do catchers communicate with? Why? Positive reinforcement get the most out of your players!

- Coach
- Umpires
- Pitchers
- Players

Throughout this session, each player is to focus on their communication. Be loud, be confident, and be positive!

Hit the Target - Throwdowns & Tags:

Set up 2 players at each base except third base. Pitcher will toss ball to home where catcher will throwdown to second base. Second base will tag and quickly throw to first who will do the same thing. First will then throw back to home to block and tag.

Players are to aim for the left knee, while those receiving will block and tag appropriately. Rotate players so everyone gets to throw from each base. How is their pop time? Note the communication throughout the drill. Are they talking and calling for the ball?

Working with pitchers:

Set each pitcher up with 1-2 catchers. Each catcher is to do 10-15 blocks down the middle, to the left, and to the right. Make sure their technique is correct. Then go into full pitching and take note of setup and framing technique.

Are catchers blocking if/when necessary?

How is their communication? Are they talking to the pitcher or just sitting back?

Give the catcher an overall summary of their 6 week experience:

1. Go over the checklists with players.
2. Check that they have an understanding of what is required as a catcher and identify some of the strengths of each of them.
3. Praise the catcher for their effort over the last 6 weeks!

Dynamic Stretches

Dynamic stretching is good for waking up muscles, to get them ready to work hard. This involves moving your limbs through the full range of motion that they will be used in during activity.

Effective Dynamic Stretching

- Always do 5-10 minutes of aerobic exercise before starting dynamic stretching
- Maintain tension in the lower abdominals to protect your lower back and to control movement of your trunk
- Keep your knees in line with your toes to protect your knees
- Do not force the movement or lose control of the movement

Gradually increase the range of the movement over a series of repetitions as you loosen up.

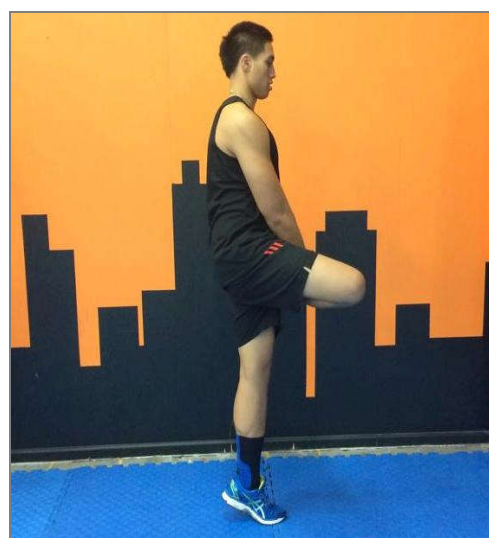
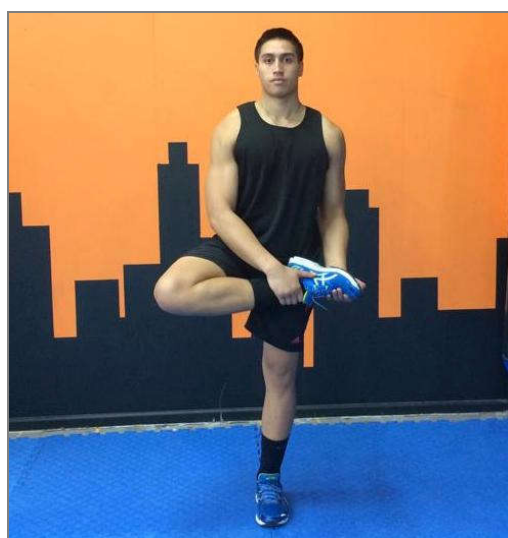
You can add these exercises in your warmup too if you choose – Jog, high knees, butt kicks, side steps stretching arms out, backward jog, straight leg kick, high skips, etc

Make sure you don't over stretch, listen to your body and know your limits.

1. Figure four

Lift one foot towards the other thigh. Grasp ankle and heel and pull up at the same time as tip toe. A few steps in between. Back straight, head and chest up.

Target: Glutes and legs.



2. Tin soldiers

Stand on the balls of feet, kick one foot forward and touch toes with opposite hand. Alternate as you move forward.

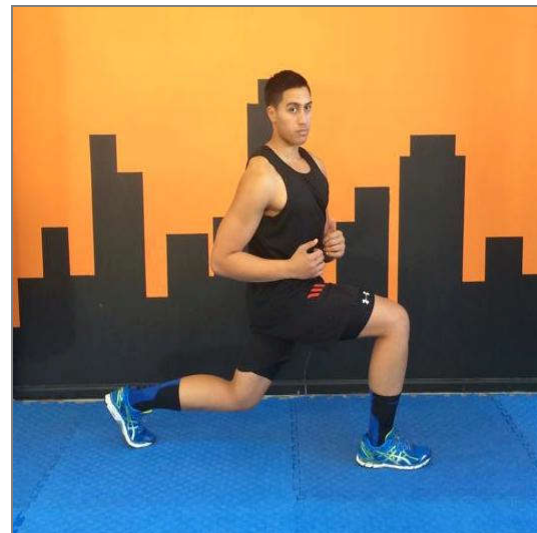
Target – Glutes and hamstrings.



3. Lunge twist

Walking forward lunge, knee behind toes, then twist torso away from extended leg then the other way. Make sure we have control of balance and core.

Target – hip flexors, core and back.



4. Knee hug

Pulling your knee into your chest at the same time as tippee toe. A few steps in between.

Target - Glutes.



5. Hip flexor

Walking forwards rotate you hips from outer to in, with a few steps in between. Also do it backwards, in to out.

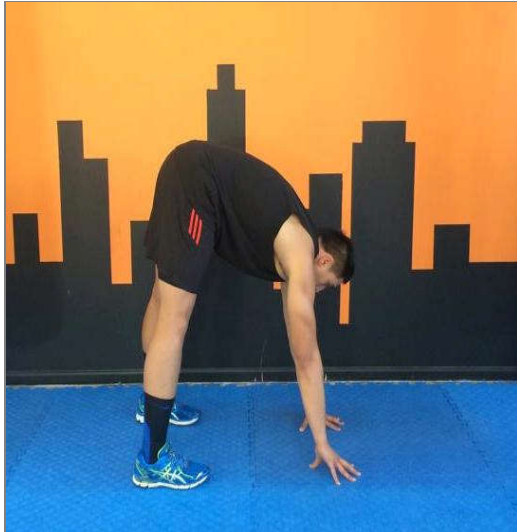
Target – Hip flexors.



6. Hand walk

Fold forwards and walk your hands out. Then bring your feet up to follow.

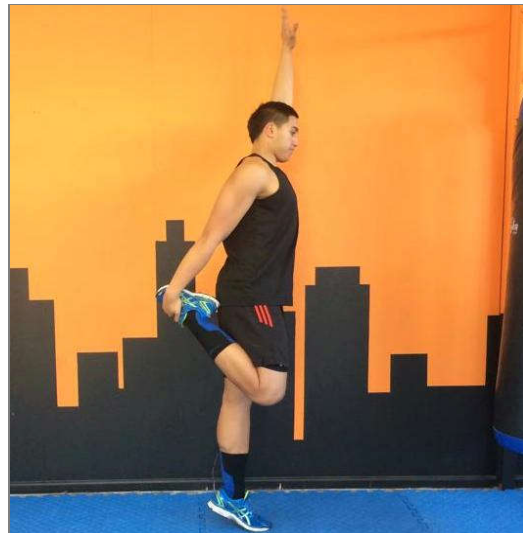
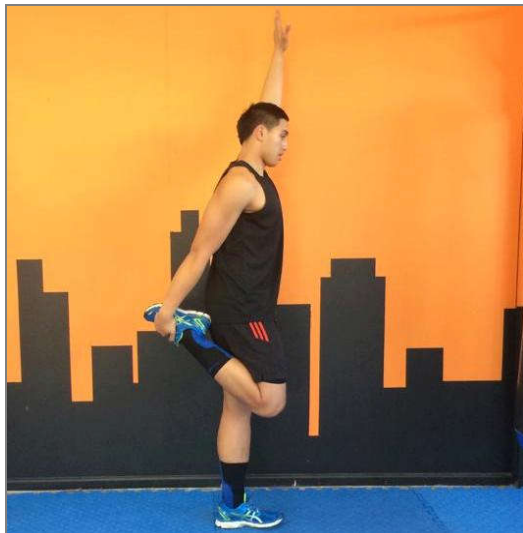
Target - Hamstrings and back.



7. Quad Stretch

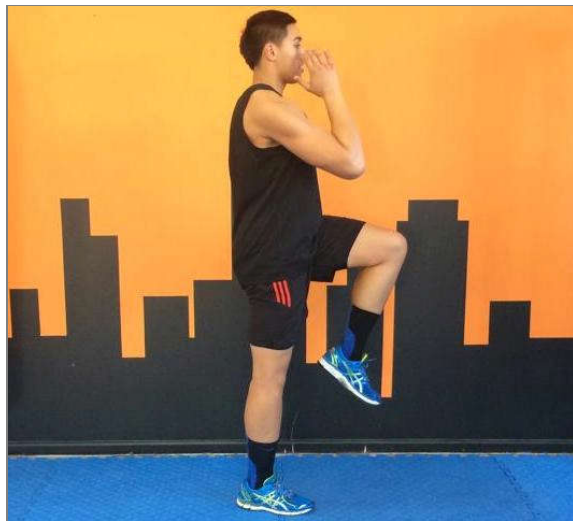
Hold foot up behind butt and reach to the sky with the other hand and tip toe. Few steps between.

Target – Quads and calves.



8. Hip Skips

Drive arms with high knees with skip.



Quick Feet/Core Dynamic Drills

Quick Feet + Explosive Jump

Have your legs shoulder width apart and on the balls of your feet, alternating each foot tapping on the ground as fast as you can. When signalled, drop down into a squat and touch the ground then explode up as high as you can with a full body extension. Repeat for a certain amount of time.



Quick Feet + Burpee

Have your legs shoulder width apart and on the balls of your feet, alternating each foot tapping on the ground as fast as you can. When signalled, drop down into a squat, and then kick your legs back enabling you to be in a plank position. Then kick legs back inward to the squat and finally explode up as high as you can with a full body extension. Repeat for a certain amount of time.



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