

Achieving the catch



A lunge stretch



Photos by
Iain Weir

Mark Edgar, Head of Medical Services for the GB Rowing Team, explains how flexibility can impact on the catch position

Last month we focused on the ability of the thigh to get close to the chest and reviewed the hip joint functions. Now we will expand on this region and look to other factors that may influence the catch position.

Your coach will advise where the

number of biomechanical positions. If the rower is not flexible enough to achieve these positions then segments of the rower's body will be subject to overstrain and possibly injury.

What is critical at this point is to accurately locate the lumbar spine and

their hands on their hips – the 'iliac crests' – and tracing the thumbs back to the bony bumps on the spine – the 'spinous processes'. The lumbar spine consists of five of these bony bumps, two of which should be felt below the thumb position and three above. This zone represents the lumbar spine.

It is a small structure in height but of massive significance if damaged. This is where our efforts on stability, core, and trunk strength should be focused.

“It is a small structure in height but of massive significance if damaged”

optimal catch position is, but there are other factors (including your crew and gearing etc) that are outside the remit of this article that also clearly affect the catch. We will continue the theme that achieving a good catch position relies on the ability of the rower to achieve a

for the coach to recognise that their commands should only result in the rower moving the appropriate segment of the spine.

The lumbar spine

It can best be located by the rower placing

Assessment of flexibility

As mentioned last time, a simple test is to try a deep squat or to place your foot on a medium to high platform and see how close the thigh can get to the chest – observing whether the ankles can bend without the heels coming off the floor.

Take it further

British Rowing's posters are coming to your club soon! Look out for the following exercises that will help your flexibility:

- Elementary flexibility – deep squat
- Elementary flexibility – foot on table



A poor range



An alternative glute stretch

If the ankles do come off the floor then sometimes the knees collapse together.

Clearly then, in this case the catch position will be compromised – and the rower will need to do calf stretching. If the knees knock together this will affect the beginning of the drive phase etc.

Repeat the deep squat with the feet in a position that reflects the foot plate or ergometer foot position. This compromises the hip joints a little but more accurately reflects the posture in the boat or on the ergo.

When the knees stop bending, review – is the chest continuing to progress towards the floor? In this case you will

need to look at hip flexibility – tightness in the gluteal / buttock muscles, tightness in the hip flexors and tightness in the hamstring muscles – see previous articles.

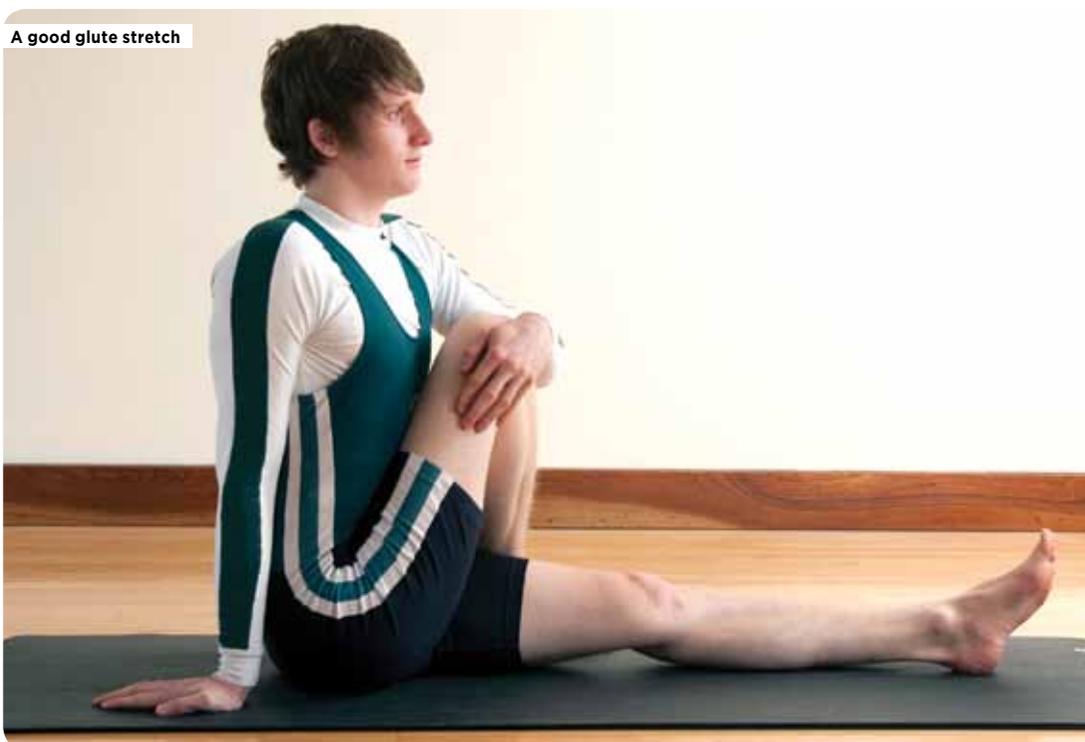
The lack of control in a deep squat may also highlight weakness within the abdominal wall, core muscles and glutei. This control, which covers stability, trunk strength or core stability, will be reviewed in another article.

In contrast, good flexibility in these areas will allow a rower to achieve the position / rowing posture that the coaches are recommending both on the water and during land training.

Equally, good stability / core / trunk strength will enable the rower to achieve the correct loading posture during the drive phase without deforming at the lumbar spine with the resultant 'bum shoving' or slumping for example. ▀

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A good glute stretch

Jenny's tip



Many rowers, particularly at the start of their career, assume they should aim for the maximum possible length at the catch, and will frequently achieve that by overreaching with the thoracic spine and overloading the lumbar spine. A strong position at the catch will not only ensure a more effective connection at the start of the drive, but may help you protect your back.

Jenny Rachel has been coaching for ten years, predominantly with men's and women's senior groups. Currently coaching the senior women's group at Maidenhead RC, Jenny is also a qualified sports and remedial therapist.