

## Flexibility is key for curlers - and it doesn't come naturally. Here are some exercises to loosen you up

**JILL BARKER**

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Myke Wilder's favourite sport is curling, a love he shares with almost 500,000 other Canadians. The season starts in a couple of weeks and Wilder is looking for a few exercises to improve his game.

"The No. 1 issue for curlers is flexibility," said Wilder, who is director of junior curling and the adult instructional program at the Montreal West Curling Club.

Indeed, the long, low lunge of a curler letting go of the rock is a classic curling pose. So, too, is the bent over posture of the sweepers as they follow the rock to the other end of the sheet.

But the kind of flexibility needed by a curler doesn't come naturally. Most curlers on the elite circuit work at it. The same can't be said for the average weekend curler. But that's about to change.

The exercises here are geared to lengthen muscles that most curlers find too tight - the hamstrings, hips, groin, low back, chest and hip flexors. And for good measure, there's one strength exercise that will help improve posture.

Some of these exercises are suitable for the warm-up, others are best performed after the last rock is thrown. Practise the exercises two to three times a week, making sure your muscles are warm before you start.

Finally, don't worry if you don't have the flexibility to perform the exercises exactly as shown. After all, that's the goal of the program. A few weeks of hard work and you'll be more limber, which will not only help you look like the pros, it will help you play like them, too.

[jbarker@videotron.ca](mailto:jbarker@videotron.ca)

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### Warm-up lunge

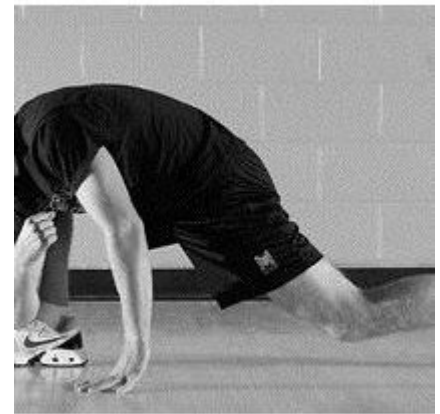
This exercise is best done during the warm-up to prepare your hips, hamstrings and torso for the lunging motion necessary for throwing the rock. Don't hold the stretch, just move through your existing range of motion, gaining mobility as you repeat the exercise.

**Start position:** Take a big step forward with your right leg and bend the knee of the front leg lowering your torso to the ground. Place your hands on either side of your right leg. The back leg is extended (the knee can be slightly bent but should be off the ground) with the heel lifted.

**Action:** Lift your right hand off the floor and place your bent elbow inside the right foot. Hold for two seconds. Put your right hand back outside the right foot and bring your back leg forward until both feet are together. Place both hands on your knees and stand up. Repeat, stepping forward with your left foot and placing your left elbow inside the left leg. Repeat two or three times on each leg.



CREDIT: ANDREW VAUGHAN, CP  
Team Canada skip Jennifer Jones during a practice last year.



CREDIT: PIERRE OBENDRAUF, THE GAZETTE

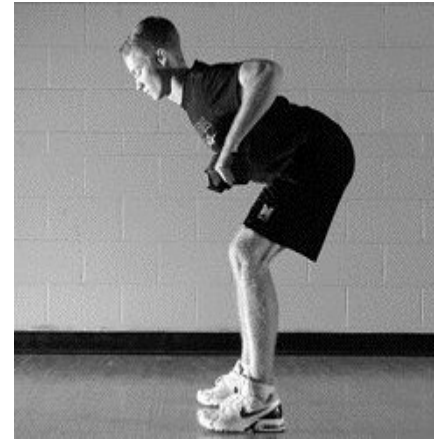
David Persons warming up for the classic curling pose.

## Bent-over row

Build upper-back strength and stretch out the chest at the same time.

**Start position:** Hold a dumbbell in each hand. Bend the knees and lower the chest (keep the back straight keeping a slight curve in the lower back) until the back reaches a 45-degree angle.

**Action:** Squeeze the shoulder blades together and pull the dumbbells into your chest (just below nipple height). Lower the dumbbells back toward the floor. Repeat 10 times.



CREDIT: PIERRE OBENDRAUF, THE GAZETTE

Bent-over row

## Sumo squat

Increase flexibility in your hips and groin with this great post-game stretch.

**Start position:** Stand tall with your feet hip distance apart.

**Action:** Bend over at the hips and grab your toes (keep your arms straight but let your knees bend). Look toward the floor keeping your head in line with the spine. Hold for two seconds. Lower your hips toward the floor and lift your upper body looking straight ahead. Hold for two seconds then lift your hips back up and straighten your legs, still holding your toes. Hold for 15-30 seconds. Soften your knees, put your hands on your thighs and stand up tall. Repeat.

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## Prone cobra

This exercise will stretch out a tight chest and strengthen the back.

**Start position:** Lie on your stomach and rest your arms by your sides, palms facing away from the body.

**Action:** Lift your chest off the floor while at the same time squeezing your shoulder blades together. Keep your head in line with the spine looking at the floor (not forward). Your arms are extended and off the floor, palms facing outward and thumbs pointing toward the ceiling. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Lower and repeat two more times.

**Variation:** Try this pose to ease tension in your low back between ends.

**Start position:** Stand tall with feet hip distance apart. Bring both hands behind your back and place them on your hips.

**Action:** Gently lean your torso backward keeping your head in line with the spine. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and repeat.

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