

## Happy Hunting Season

By Arthur R. Minery, PT

This time of year brings upon so many changes for each of us; the leaves have made their colorful descent and the first snow fall isn't that far away. It's hard to imagine that one of the best sports is upon us, not in a stadium filled with 50,000 screaming fans but right in the woods behind our homes. That's right--it's hunting season!

For most of us, preparing for hunting season involves stocking up on the latest and greatest gear and gadgets. However, it is just as important to prepare yourself physically to prevent injury and make the hunt more enjoyable.

Let's consider the physical demands that hunting places on the body. When was the last time you dragged 120 pounds up to 2 miles through the woods? Now add your own body weight and uneven terrain and you've made the physical demand even more momentous. When was the last time you had to depend on your stomach and back muscles to steady yourself long enough to hold a bow at full draw for 2-5 minutes or steady a shotgun under perfect silence to wait for the best shot? Even your legs are of great importance in moving forward during a drag, climbing up/down the tree stand, or setting up the decoys in the waist-deep rippling water.

The following are things we can all do to prepare for the short season out in the woods:

- Begin a disciplined stretching program that you're comfortable with. Gentle movements with your neck, shoulders, back and legs are a good way to gain more flexibility. Do the stretches daily and you should notice a difference in your ability to move with greater freedom.
- Begin a strengthening program. Start with the basics: push ups, sits ups, jumping jacks, touching shoulders knees toes while bending the knees, climbing the stairs, or lifting light weights at home. Remember to work with the legs and the trunk muscles (abdominals and back muscles), these are the key in going the distance!
- Begin taking short walks in the WOODS and get familiar with the terrain in which you will be hunting. Eventually build up your distance. If you can't take the time to get in to the woods, begin to walk briskly up to 20-30 minutes, eventually include hills for a greater challenge.
- Challenge your body in a slow progressive manner and it will respond to the increased demand that hunting season brings. Start small and work your way up.

Of course these are general guidelines. Make sure to consult with your physician or a health care professional to determine your physical readiness for hunting or any strenuous physical activity.