[IMAGE]

Feel the Runner's High

By Dr. Perry Nickelston

For too many people, the only time they'll even consider running is if they're being chased! The truth is running can be easy and fun to do. It's inexpensive, readily available, can be done at just about any age, makes you feel years younger and has massive health benefits. (And if you ever do find yourself being chased for any reason, it would be nice to be able to outrun your chaser!) By implementing a few simple strategies, you can take running to heights never imagined. Let's take a look at <u>some of the fundamentals of running</u> and how to make it a regular part of your exercise routine.

What's the difference between jogging and running?

This distinction might seem obvious, but it's actually an important one: Running means you are moving at a faster pace than jogging. Technically, if it takes you less than nine minutes to complete one mile, you are running. If it takes you more than nine minutes, you are jogging. Jogging is harder than walking because it requires more muscle to go faster, breathe deeper, and maintain proper balance. Running requires more effort than jogging and is more intense. It requires stamina to go faster and endurance to go for longer periods of time.

It is always best to start jogging regularly for approximately one month before progressing to running; this will build up your body's ability to handle the additional stresses and pounding of the joints. Both jogging and running are considered <u>excellent cardiovascular and aerobic forms of exercise</u> that are beneficial to your heart, lungs, muscles and for burning body fat.

What are the health benefits of running?

<u>Runner - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark </u>Running is one of the best forms of aerobic conditioning for your heart and lungs. It can significantly increase your metabolic rate and the amount of calories you burn, leading to loss of excess body fat. Running is also beneficial for slowing down the aging process. Those who run regularly are less likely to experience bone and muscle loss due to the body's positive response to additional physical demands.

Running can also have many psychological benefits. Most runners typically report being happier and feeling less stressed from the grind of daily life. Why? Because regular exercise has the ability to alter mood, attributable to a surge in hormones called endorphins. These hormones create a sense of euphoria often referred to as a "runner's high" and can result in an improvement in mood.

Running has also been reported to alleviate stress. One of the most obvious reasons is that the act of running allows the individual to focus on the task at hand (living in the moment), instead of being worried or stressed about work, family or other stressors of daily life. Additionally, running can be very challenging on the body, which can result in the individual feeling a sense of accomplishment by completing the run. It shifts the focus of attention from negative stressors to a sense of pride and accomplishment. In short, you feel good and you look good!

What are the health risks of running?

Running without adequate rest and recovery between workouts can lead to overtraining syndrome. This syndrome occurs when the body has insufficient time to repair itself from the physical demands placed upon it and subsequent "wear and tear" ensues. Your chance of suffering overuse injuries such as muscle tendinitis, joint aches, bursitis, and ligament sprains increases as a result. The most common injuries associated with running are: knee pain (aka runner's knee), hip pain, ankle pain, heel spurs, shin splints, and plantar fasciitis (pain on the bottom of the foot). Fortunately, most of these can be avoided with proper pre-exercise warming up, the right type of running shoes, post-exercise cooldowns, and smart preparation before intensive training.

Excessive running may also cause a negative hormonal response known as the "cortisol effect." Produced by the adrenal glands, cortisol is nicknamed the "stress hormone" since it is released when the body is put under too much physical or emotional stress. You may experience fatigue, lethargy (a sense that you just can't get moving), depression and achy joints. It is also known as "belly-fat syndrome" because of its tendency to deposit body fat around your midsection. (We definitely don't want that.) Additionally, cortisol is a catabolic hormone, meaning it breaks down lean muscle tissue.

So you see, *too much* running could actually make you fatter because you'll lose muscle mass and retain body fat. You may look thinner in the mirror, but you'll be what they call *skinny fat*; skinny in appearance but with an increased total body fat mass. Due to subsequent loss in lean muscle, you will be more prone to injury since the body will have less anatomical support structure for proper movement. So, the key is to

keep your running workouts intense, but in moderation and allowing for adequate rest and recovery.

How can you avoid injury while running?

First and foremost, you must prepare your body for the physical demands of running. You cannot simply throw on some fancy running shoes, do a few quick stretches, and hit the open road without expecting an injury to occur. With a proper warm-up, you will notice a significant increase in your strength, power, speed, flexibility, recovery and overall performance. A proper warm-up for running focuses on increasing mobility (movement) in your ankles and hips, dynamic (active) stretching of the legs and glutes (buttocks),and increasing blood flow in the fascial (soft-tissue) system of your body.

Many people mistakenly believe five minutes of static stretching (holding a stretch longer than 2-5 seconds) is an adequate way to prepare for running. In actuality, it is the worst thing you could possibly do. Static stretching of muscles prior to physical activity engages the "stretch reflex," a neurological self-protective reflex response whereby a muscle tightens in anticipation of being injured. This type of stretching actually shortens muscle length, hindering athletic performance and increasing your chances of injury. Static stretch-and-hold techniques should be done *after exercising,* when your muscles are adequately warmed up.

Tips for a successful, challenging running experience

I consulted running coach Chipper Robinson from Running on the Edge (www.edgeworkout.com) in Ramsey, N.J., for some advice on how to make running safe, challenging and effective. Chipper was a 1968 Olympic trial competitor and competed in three national championships. Here are some of his suggestions for how to get a great running workout, based on his 20-plus years of experience coaching people of all ages and skill levels:

- **Incorporate cross training** into your running routines. Add weight-lifting, bicycling, yoga, elliptical training, or swimming. Why? They make you fitter and less prone to injury.
- **Exercise your abdominal muscle**s almost every day. A strong midsection (core) is a key component to running. In fact, it can often be the single most important factor for success in long-distance running.
- **Change your intensity levels** by running faster or farther. Alternate which one you choose to implement in various workouts. It prevents your body from adapting to routines.
- **Pay attention to your shoes.** Most shoes wear out after 300 to 500 miles. You often can't see the wear, but, your knees, hips, and back will feel it. Visit a running specialty store for quality shoes and

talk to your doctor for suggestions on the best shoes to get. Not just any shoe will do.

- **Run on different surfaces.** See how many different surfaces you can run on in a month: asphalt, gravel, trail, grass, track, treadmill, and beach. Each stresses your leg muscles in a slightly different way, helping to prevent overuse injuries. (If possible, avoid concrete, the hardest and most harmful surface for runners.)

- **Keep a training journal.** A journal can be a great way to maintain motivation and consistency. Keep it filled with running times, routines, motivational quotes, and how your body reacts to various routines. You should have a documented road map for reaching your running goals.

- **Take some time off.** You don't have to run every day, every week, or even every month (as long as you're performing other cardiovascular activities). For healthy, consistent training, your body needs regular recovery periods. Performance suffers with too much exercise. Start slow and work your way toward higher mileages and/or more frequency.

- **Introduce high-intensity interval training** into your running routine. Alternate, pace, speed, tempo and rest periods during a single running session. For example, keep a steady pace for a mile and then sprint run for 30 seconds. Do this for several cycles and notice how your heart rate and muscle fatigue threshold increase.

Now that you know more information than the "average Joe" about running, it's time to take that first step toward a healthier you. Every great journey starts with a single step; now just put one foot in front of the other to see how far this new journey takes you. I have a feeling you will discover a passion for the open road you never knew existed. Welcome to the wonderful world of running.

Don't Hit the Door Running - Warm-Up First!

Many people think you can throw on your shoes, open your front door and run like the wind. That's actually a great way to increase the likelihood of suffering an injury and ending up in bed or on the couch, unable to run at all. Here are a few warm-up secrets (take about 10-15 minutes) that can prepare you for each run and improve your performance and results.

Foam Rolling is a form of self-applied deep-tissue massage using a compressed cylindric foam tube. It acts as a form of acupressure to increase blood flow and circulation to muscles and the underlying fascial (connective tissue) system of the body. It is recommended to do rolling prior to any form of stretching. Typical time is 30 seconds per muscle group. Focus on the hip/buttock (gluteus) regions on both sides. Do

the calves, and upper legs (front, back, inner, outer). You will find this an invaluable asset to your warm-up. Foam rollers are available online or at most larger sports stores.

Active Isolated Stretching is a special form of stretching created by physical therapist Aaron Mattes, that uses ropes to assist the end range of motion. The secret comes from holding the stretch for up to 2 seconds only, doing 10 repetitions and assisting the stretch by pulling on the rope with light (about 2 pounds) of pressure. This prevents the "stretch reflex" associated with static stretching, and it warms up muscles as well as joints. This is extremely important for hip and ankle mobility. Just one degree loss of motion in the ankle can cause significant injury in the knee or back. Knee pain, which is the most common injury complaint in running, is always linked to an underlying hip movement or stabilization problem. So, whenever your knee hurts stretch and work on your hips. The following are two effective AIS stretches for loosening up your hips:

- *Rope abduction:* Begin lying on your back, wrapping a rope/strap around your foot and the inside of your ankle. Hold the rope with your same-side hand while maintaining both shoulders on the ground. Raise your leg one inch off the ground and abduct (move away from your body), making sure to keep your toes pointed upright. Assist with the rope at the end of the stretch for 2 seconds and repeat for 10 repetitions. Repeat on the other side. You should feel this on the inner thigh and hip.
- *Rope adduction*: Lying on your back, wrap a rope around your foot and the outside of your ankle. Hold the rope with your opposite-side hand while maintaining both shoulders on the ground. Raise your leg 6 inches above the opposite leg and adduct (move toward your body), making sure to keep your toes pointed upright. Assist with the rope at the end of the stretch for 2 seconds and repeat for 10 repetitions. Repeat on the other side. You should feel this on the outer thigh and hip.

Dynamic Stretching is movement-based stretching of muscle groups. This gets the body ready for full-body movement patterns and does not isolate just one single muscle. The body functions as a unit and muscles do not contract individually, particularly when running. So, in order to prevent injury and increase performance, you must move to stretch. The following are two dynamic stretches designed to loosen the hips and core:

- *Hip huggers:* While standing, bring one leg up toward your chest by externally (turning out) your hip. Grasp the ankle and foot to assist the stretch. Be sure to full extend the support leg by squeezing your glutes (buttocks) and standing briefly on your toes at the top of the movement. Alternate sides and

repeat six times.

- *Reverse lunge with twist:* Step back into a lunge position with one leg. Tighten your buttock on the rear leg. Put your arms overhead, twist to the opposite side and lean your body slightly to the side. Return to starting standing position. Alternate sides and repeat six times.

Perry Nickelston, DC, is clinical director of the Pain Laser Center in Ramsey, N.J., where he focuses on performance enhancement, corrective exercise and metabolic fitness nutrition To learn more about Dr. Nickelston, visit www.painlasercenter.com/Our_Practice.html.

Page printed from:

http://www.toyourhealth.com/mpacms/tyh/article.php?id=1289&pagenumber=1&no_paginate=true&no_b=true