

Warm up, stand tall to hit the road running

Running is probably the most natural form of exercise. However, up to half of all runners will experience an injury in any given year. Whether you're running for fun on mountain trails or forest paths or training for a marathon, a bit of care is need to avoid hurting yourself. Here is some general information for novice and active runners to enhance performance and prevent injury.

Prepare your muscles to run. My recommendation is that you jog lightly for two to four minutes, then stop and perform lateral movements that exaggerate the running form. For example, perform a long exaggerated lunge, where your hands touch the ground and your rear leg is straight. Also good: shallow side lunges, downward dog to plank, or around the worlds (like hip circles but much more involved). Gently move to maximum range of motion, lasting two to three seconds. Remember, movement prep is just that: preparing to move.

Janet Hamilton, assistant professor in the School of Health Sciences at Clayton College and author of the book *Running Strong and Injury-Free*

writes: "One of the most consistent factors involved in the onset of running injuries is training errors. These may include simple things such as increasing mileage too quickly or running too many miles per week. Another training factor to consider is the intensity of the training on a day-to-day basis."

Hamilton says most runners should build their foundation of endurance first – no more than 10 percent per week of total mileage – and then start increasing intensity.

Shin splints? Almost everyone knows what they are and most likely has experienced them. Googling "shin splints" generates an array of similar diagnoses and prognoses with common causes, such as tight Achilles and calf muscles, running on uneven terrain, poor shoe support, overpro-

nation, etc.

Core strength is necessary to counteract shin splints and run efficiently. If the core (hip joint to armpits and everything around it) sustains itself, then the legs do not have to work harder.

A second point: Run tall. If you are 6 feet tall, stay that way when running. Third, lean slightly forward during the

running pattern, and fourth, obtain a smooth heel strike to toe off, which can be done by landing on mid-foot.

Now before opinions are unleashed, remember, my philosophy corresponds to global thinking.

Janet Hamilton says studies examining the role of flexibility in runner injuries are inconclusive at best. This may be in part because the definition of "injury" in various studies is inconsistent and because different researchers define "adequate flexibility" differently.

From a purely common-sense standpoint, if a muscle is functioning at or near the end of its available range of motion, only a small amount of additional load is necessary to push it over the edge to injury. And the muscle with limited flexibility may provide additional load to the joints it crosses, as well as the muscles that oppose it, thereby possibly reducing a runner's efficiency. When examining the frequency of various tendon injuries, the key areas to consider are the calf, hamstring and quadriceps muscle groups.

There are several theories about the "best" way to promote flexibility. Static stretching (slow movements, 30-second hold) and dynamic stretching (moderate speed, two- to three-second hold) are among the most popular. Use a combination of forms, but don't view

one type as the only way to stretch. Do what is best for you.

Iliotibial band syndrome is often misdiagnosed and mistreated. The syndrome presents pain that is generally focused on the outside of the knee and often gets worse when running hilly terrain or faster intervals. The problem is often attributed to running on the crown of the road – where the road slopes to the side to allow runoff of the rainwater – or to oversupination. But in reality, these two factors are rarely, if ever, involved, and the IT band is the victim, not the perpetrator. Generally the source of the problem is inadequate "core" strength in the hips, lack of adequate flexibility in the calves and hamstrings, and excessive or late pronations of the foot that is not being adequately supported by running shoes. In the extremely rare case of ITBS, gentle stretching of this region as well as the others (calves and hamstrings, hip complex) is warranted.

Fixing the little things can help you enjoy running for many years to come without injuries. Be pain free to enjoy the outdoors.

Augustine (Augie) Hernandez Jr. owns Training to Be Balanced LLC. He is a movement specialist in most sports. Reach him at augie@t2bb.net or www.trainingtobebalanced.net.



Training to be balanced

Augie Hernandez