

Injury Prevention

Running-related injuries (specifically the overuse variety) can wreak havoc on a training season. This is especially the case for first-time runners, whose bodies are not accustomed to the repetitive stress associated with running on hard surfaces. Most injuries are a result of poor form, misalignment or simply ignoring pain signals. So how do we give ourselves the best chance to remain injury-free in both the short and long-term?

- Pain isn't "weakness leaving the body." Pain is pain, and pain means something is wrong. It takes an experienced runner to understand what sort of things you can "run through" and what should bring the workout to an immediate halt. The general rule is that if you feel a dull ache when you are not performing exercise then you're probably OK and just need a little extra TLC. Anything that is sharp, stabbing or shooting during the run could be cause for immediate concern.
- Prioritize recovery. Good sleep hygiene and proper nutrition are the keys to recovering from a strenuous workout or rigorous exercise session. Make sure you are giving your body it's best chance to get back to 100% after you've stressed your system. Your recovery should start immediately after a workout with an adequate cool-down, and you should also be mindful of when you are fully recovered and ready to tackle your next session. It is OK to modify your training on-the-fly if you need an extra 24 hours to get back to feeling your best.
- Fix your form. Heel-striking is a taboo term in the running world, but it is just one of many symptoms of overstriding. Overstriding occurs when you reach your legs too far out in front of your body, and is common among first-time runners. Our brains are telling us to take big, long strides to cover more ground, while in reality we are biomechanically-designed to take shorter, more efficient strides. No one has perfect running form, and everyone's gait and stride is unique. While there are general guidelines you can follow to help minimize your risk of injury, cleaning up your form is a life-long process so don't expect results overnight!
- Embrace a holistic approach. Running more is not going to fix the misalignment in your hips, just like strength-training isn't going to magically cure you of your tendency to overstride. A good relationship with the sport of running should embrace all components of physical fitness. Incorporate mobility and flexibility exercises into your weekly routine, as well as cross-training and strength-training activities. Stretch, roll, sleep, eat well...then repeat. The more well-rounded of an athlete you become, the better of a runner you'll be.