

Cross-training & Strength-training

Some of the most common questions I get are about cross-training and strength-training exercises. They can help runners of all shapes, sizes and ability levels become stronger, faster and more efficient while remaining healthy at the same time. It's very easy to get lost in the weeds when it comes to incorporating these methods into your routine, so let's cut through the confusion and stick with the basics.

It's true that every sort of cross-training or strength-training you do can benefit your running in some way. However, there are some fundamental exercises and basic movement patterns that will give you the most bang for your buck. The easiest and most effective exercise I program for runners of all ability levels are planks. There are variations and modifications you can work through in order to enhance the degree of efficacy, but every runner can benefit from a stronger core. If you want to work on some mobility and flexibility while giving yourself the option to add an external load (additional weight), I recommend squats and lunges. Finally, for a more experienced runner, I'll transition them into unilateral exercises like a single-leg Romanian deadlift or pistol squats.

What's important here is to focus on cross-training and strength-training that is specifically suited for your individual goals and level of ability. Just like anything else, it is better (not to mention safer) to build from the ground up and develop a strong base before progressing into a more complex program with multiple variables. Let me put it this way...if you can't stand on one leg without losing your balance you shouldn't try to deadlift. If you are injury-prone, or have postural or structural imbalances, it is much wiser to address these issues and get to the root of the problem instead of covering them up.

The best advice I can give is to just keep it simple. Unless you are training under heavy loads with high intensity and at crazy volume, any movement is good movement. Try not to complicate things, and just throw in a few bodyweight squats or a minute or two of planks at the end of every run. Proper functional technique and good posture is going to provide the most direct relational improvement to your overall running economy and efficiency.