

## Golden Rules of Running Injury Prevention

Aches and pains are the plague of many recreational runners, but they don't have to be. The majority of running injuries are caused by training errors and are avoidable by following the **Golden Rules of Running Injury Prevention**.

**Mix it up.** Running is by nature a very repetitive sport. That repetition can lead to overuse injuries. Changing the running surface, pace, distance, or incline alters how impact forces are transferred through the body and how the body structures respond. Adding variety to the running routine not only leads to a stronger, more balanced runner, but also decreases the amount of wear and tear on any one body structure.

**Ease into change.** The human body is amazing in its ability to adapt to change. That adaptation however takes time, sometimes weeks or months, and runners are not always patient creatures. Force too much, too soon and injury is likely to follow. Any change in the running routine – be it new shoes, new running surface, new running pace, adding hill or speed work, increasing distance, etc. – should be approached very gradually to give the bones, tendons, and muscles time to adapt.

**Respect recovery.** Running causes microtears in the muscles, ligaments, and tendons. Through the process of repair, the body becomes stronger. Repair however occurs during periods of rest. Rest should take the form of both low impact cross training (swimming, yoga, and cycling for example) and complete days off from physical activity. Unfortunately, the older the runner, the longer the recovery process takes.

**Train in cycles.** Running develops some muscles more than others. That muscle imbalance, along with the constant repetition of running, can lead to injury. At least twice a year for two or three months, give the body a break. Run some regularly at reduced mileages to maintain a base, but focus primarily on a different sport such as swimming or tennis, or other activity that develops cardiovascular and muscular endurance.

**Wear properly fitted shoes.** Feet come in all shapes and sizes and the variety of running shoes to put on them is seemingly endless. Don't go it alone in the discount store. The professionals at running shoe specialty stores such as Fleet Feet in Gaithersburg, RnJ Sports in Rockville, and If the Shoe Fits in Frederick are your best bet for finding the right shoe for your foot and your style of running. But once you find that shoe, don't wear it forever. Usually the body will tell you when you need new shoes with minor new aches and stiffness in the feet, knees, or hips. But at a maximum, replace shoes every 300-500 miles.

**Maintain a solid core.** The core muscles – muscles of the back, abdomen, and hips – are the powerhouse for runners, stabilizing the body and giving the legs a firm foundation to generate force. Weakness in the core muscles leads to a lack of running efficiency and also often alters the running stride in ways that lead to injury.

**Address aches and pains quickly.** Most runners fear being told to stop running and try to ignore aches and pains as long as possible. Unfortunately, the longer an injury is ignored the more difficult it is to correct. In addition, pain in one body part often causes slight adjustments to the runner's stride mechanics which, over time, create secondary injuries in other body parts. With proper training modifications, runners can often continue to train while recovering from an injury. See a physical therapist specializing in the treatment of runners if an ache lingers for more than a week or is recurring.

Davis, SN. (2011, June) Golden Rules of Running Injury Prevention. The Town Courier, p. 37.