

10 Common Running Myths

By Nicole Weidensaul | For Active.com

Navigating the world of running can be tough. There seems to be conflicting information about certain topics such as stretching, carb loading, consuming sports drinks, running barefoot and strength training. Let's take a look at some myths about running and clear up some common misconceptions.

Myth 1: Stretch Before You Run

While stretching is important for athletes, static stretching (holding a stretch for a period of time) absolutely should not be done before running. Static stretching is best to do after your run. Instead, warm up with dynamic movements like walking lunges, leg swings, butt kicks, high knees and straight leg kicks.

Myth 2: Hydrate With a Sports Drink

With so many different beverages on the market and the warnings about staying hydrated, grabbing a sports drink seems like a good choice. But it's not necessarily the correct choice. If your workout is less than one hour long, there's no need to consume a sports drink. Choose water for those shorter workouts. If your workout is longer than an hour, then you should consume a sports drink to replace calories and electrolytes lost during training.

Myth 3: Eat Pasta Before a Race

Many athletes think they need to carb load before an event. Truth is, unless your event is longer than two hours, there's no need to alter your diet in any way. If your event is over two hours, it's beneficial to increase your carbohydrate consumption in the week leading up to the race; not the night before. Instead of gorging at the pre-race pasta dinner, eat something you've had during training so that you know it won't upset your stomach.

Myth 4: Run Every Day

Running every day is not necessary; in fact it can be harmful and lead to overtraining, burnout and injury. Instead, incorporate cross-training (i.e., swimming, biking, elliptical machine, rowing) into your routine. Many athletes find that they perform best if they take at least one day off from training each week, while other athletes do better with two rest days each week. Experiment during training and see what works best for you.

Myth 5: Mileage is All That Matters

Many runners are only concerned with their weekly mileage and think that's the measure of a true runner. However, what you do with those miles is more important than the actual number of miles that you run. Running 6 miles a day at the same pace five days a week is fine, but to boost running performance, an athlete should alternate between hard days (tempo runs, hill work and speed work) and one long run each week. Varying the intensity and the mileage during your workouts will help you make greater performance gains than running at the same pace and distance every day.

Myth 6. You Can't Miss a Workout

Even experienced runners have a hard time with this one. As stated in myth four, many runners can benefit from at least one day off from activity each week. Outside of your regularly scheduled rest day, some common sense will go a long way in keeping you healthy and strong. For example, it can be beneficial to skip your planned workout for the day if you're tired, sick, or you feel any pain. A day off now could prevent having to take a week off later. Try to look at the big picture. One individual workout does not make or break your training.

Myth 7: Runners Don't Need to Strength Train

Multiple studies have proven that strength training is effective and beneficial for runners. Strength training improves running performance and can reduce the risk of injury (see myth eight). An effective routine doesn't have to take a lot of time; 15 to 30 minutes a couple of times a week will make you a stronger, more well-rounded athlete. Focus primarily on your legs and core. Do unilateral movements and

exercises that focus on balance and stability, such as single-leg exercises, BOSU and stability ball training. Change your routine every couple of weeks to avoid hitting a training plateaus.

Myth 8: Flexibility is King

With the increased popularity of yoga, many runners think they need to be as flexible as Gumby to run their best. The truth is, overly flexible joints are less stable, which makes them more prone to being overstretched. Your body needs stable joints with strong muscles surrounding them to keep everything in place. Therefore, stability is more important than flexibility. You can increase your stability through strength training and balance drills (see myth seven).

Myth 9: Running in Cold Weather is Unhealthy

This myth has been around a long time. Viruses and bacteria make you sick, running in the cold does not. You're more likely to catch a cold if you stay inside because that's where germs can thrive and spread. Instead, dress appropriately for the weather (layers are best) and be sure to keep your head and your hands warm.

Myth 10: Barefoot Running is Best

Christopher McDougall's book *Born to Run* helped to spark the barefoot/minimalist running craze. While barefoot running can help certain individuals, it's not the end all be all answer to your running prayers. If you want to give minimalist shoes a try, you need to do so gradually. Try walking in the shoes first to get used to them. Then try wearing them on your short runs. Build your mileage slowly to minimize potential injuries that can occur if you make the switch before you're ready (most notably calf strain and Achilles tendinitis).