

# Prevent Running Overuse Injuries in 6 Steps

Sabrina Grotewald – Active.com

To improve as a runner, regardless of your ability and experience, you need to run consistently over long periods of time. But logging miles regularly—some at quicker paces to prepare for races—can result in overuse injuries.

Outsmart injury with this six-step process:

1. Learn your body
2. Develop efficient patterns of movement
3. Improve joint mobility
4. Strength train
5. Identify training errors
6. Increase your body awareness

## Learn Your Body

When runners and triathletes visit Erik Taylor, a National Academy of Sports Medicine certified trainer in Redondo Beach, California, the first thing he does is analyze their strengths and weaknesses. Sounds simple, but this requires a trained eye.

"There are deviations in biomechanics and these will lead to injuries," Taylor says.

If you've suffered from the same recurring injury, or experience soreness, tightness or aches in the same places frequently, visit a trained specialist, sports medicine doctor or physical therapist for a biomechanical analysis.

"Evaluating and addressing possible misalignment, motion or stability issues can optimize a runner's ability to cope with the repetitive pounding and occasional overreaching associated with running," says Ken Nicodemus, exercise physiologist and director of The Fit Stop Human Performance Lab in Carlsbad, California.

One way to help with stability issues is to choose your running shoes carefully, Nicodemus advises. Ensure the type and fit is appropriate for your mechanics and terrain, and replace worn shoes every 400 to 500 miles. If you experiment with a new brand or type—minimalist shoes, for example—give yourself time to adjust. Start with a 20-minute easy run in the new shoes and increase time in them gradually if you don't experience discomfort or blisters.

## **Develop Efficient Patterns of Movement**

After Taylor, a former member of the Nike Farm Team (a post-collegiate running program whose goal was to develop Olympians and national champions), exposes a client's weaknesses, he helps him or her build structural integrity, or the foundation of a strong, injury-free body.

"Building the base of biomechanics helps you move efficiently without deviations," says Taylor. "For example, when you perform a functional exercise [such as a plank], everything should be in alignment; the midline of your core should be strong enough to hold your spine without deviation."

Performing exercises with good form teaches the body how to move more effectively. If you can execute a simple lunge or plank properly, imagine how much easier running when you're tired will feel.

## **Improve Joint Mobility**

Taylor recommends foam rolling or deep-tissue sports massage, and stretching and yoga to encourage joint mobility.

"The foam roller helps break up scar tissue and loosen the tendons so the muscles are at the proper length," says Taylor. "If you're healthy, roll out the areas that are tight—in runners that's typically the Achilles, psoas, quads, piriformis—four to five times a week. If you have a history of injuries, roll out for 10 to 15 minutes every day."

Taylor warns that there's a point of diminishing return with foam rolling. Avoid putting so much pressure on the area that it hurts worse when you're done.

## **Strength Train**

There are muscles that get neglected when all you do is run and, over time, this can create imbalances that lead to injury. "Strength training will only improve performance, regardless of your sport," says Taylor.

Taylor introduces his running clients to strength training by emphasizing proper execution of movements before adding weight and repetition to make the exercises harder. He switches up the exercises, and ensures that one weekly session features a load-heavy weight session and one weekly session includes circuit-type training.

Stagger your weekly strength and run workouts so that an easy run or day off follows your heavy load session, and you're not completing circuits (such as plyometrics paired with push-ups and squats) the night before or morning of a speed session.

## Identify Training Errors

"One of the top causes of overuse injuries in runners is training error," says Nicodemus. "Common errors can include adding too much intensity, distance or both too quickly, or not providing appropriate recovery between hard or unusually long efforts."

Avoid these mistakes by embracing the 10 percent rule—don't increase volume by more than 10 percent each week. Make sure your training plan provides adequate recovery time between hard and long efforts, and if you're running fatigued too many days in a row, back off some.

"Preventing injury requires a delicate balance between overreaching and recovery," says Nicodemus. "Finding this 'precision-oriented' path is the number one priority."

Take a conservative approach when increasing intensity as well. Nicodemus suggests that runners define their individual training parameters in order to manage speed work effectively. Identify benchmarks at the start of a training cycle and periodically throughout it so you know you're training at the right level. Strap on a heart-rate monitor during a workout, run a time trial, or complete a race to track your progression.

## Increase Body Awareness

Running often, even daily, doesn't have to result in injury. "I believe that most of us should avoid running every day to avoid overuse injury," says Nicodemus. "However, I have observed that injury is not inevitable with daily running, as I've seen clients who train extreme miles and never overreach to the point of injury.

"I think the key to their success is they manage well their rate of mileage increase and how the intensity is applied."

Pay attention to your body's signals—if you experience pain, stop and evaluate the situation. Take a day or more off from running and spend the time doing pre-hab to prevent overuse injuries. "Work on being proactive with injuries," advises Taylor. "If stuff is tight, foam roll and ice so you don't get injured. Get on it right away so it doesn't happen."

### *About the Author*

*Sabrina Grotewold is the running editor for active.com. She runs nearly every day, and enjoys cooking and developing recipes, traveling, and hiking.*