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RUN INJURY FREE

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Meet a runner and you'll hear about an injury. Among runners, injuries may be an even hotter topic than mile splits from the last race. But guess what? Injuries don't have to be a part of your plan. They are optional.

Here are the main reasons running injuries occur and what you can do about them:

FOLLOWING SOMEBODY ELSE'S PLAN

Following a "legend's" plan you read about in a magazine or following a workout partner's protocol can lead you down the road to injury. First off,, it's important to realize that the professional athlete you may be emulating didn't get THAT fast due to those workouts that are being published. He got that good because he picked the right parents! In other words, genetics is the key contributor to just HOW well you're going to do. You simply can't train a 24:00 5k down to a 16:00. It's not going to happen. I bring this up because I really think many age groupers start following a "legend's" plan thinking that this will also help them in the same way that it helped the "legend." And trying to keep up with those monster volume training plans they usually list will not likely get you injured. The funny thing is, often the PRO being written about doesn't do those workouts either. He/she maybe did them one time or it's simply got exaggerated. Trust me, this happens. When I was body building, I got featured in Ironman magazine. I got this magazine in the mail and was shocked how they told the story. All of my workouts were exaggerated. A better read, I guess? You should follow a plan that is based on overload and based on your goals. Following your' buddy's plan is typically not the way to go either. If y he's smart, he's doing what he needs to do. If you're doing his plan, then you're also doing what he needs to do.

RUNNING WITH UNCORRECTED BIOMECHANICAL FLAWS

You hear all the time that running causes injuries. This is not true. The most recent research indicates that running in now way causes arthritis. Prior injuries are correlated with arthritis (another reason no to get hurt and run through pain). What does contribute to running injuries is running with biomechanical flaws, such as pronating or supinating. Or maybe you have a leg length discrepancy, or you run with very old shoes, which can lead to improper heel strike. In any event, if you run with a perfect (normal or fixed) heel strike, running will not cause injuries. So how do you fix this? Easy. Get orthotic shoe lifts, other shoe inserts, and anything that fixes the problem. Chiropractic care is known to help also, I have had orthotics for years to fix a pronating problem and I haven't had a problem since I put them in.

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RUNNING ON A BODY WITH WEAK MUSCLES

If you only run, your muscular system will be out of balance and the other muscles you need to keep the joints together and strong will have atrophied. This leads to injuries. Running does not use all muscle groups so therefore you have to supplement your running to ensure all the protective muscles get worked. For example, running does not strengthen the VMO (part of the quad). This muscle is responsible for the proper tracking of the knee cap. When this muscle atrophies, the knee cap doesn't track, and this leads to "runner's knee." What's the fix? Very simple—hit the gym and see that you're working all 10 major muscle groups. Make sure you work out 2 times per week and make your body stronger. If you're not getting stronger at the gym, you're not getting stronger. Don't worry, you won't bulk up. Genetics takes care of that, too.

OVERTRAINING

Your body gets stronger by breaking down during the workout and building back up while you rest. If you workout the same muscles that your body is trying to repair, you will not get stronger and you will get hurt. I'm not a big fan of running every day. And with all that we know about cross training, you really don't need to. Any time you run on tired muscles, you're asking for trouble. This could also come into play if you make your long run TOO long. Again, this is another easy solution. After you run, rest the next day by taking off or cross training. Obviously, the further you get from one sport to the other, the more rest you're getting. For example, you'll get your legs all the rest they need if you swim on days between runs. Research also shows that runners get a lot of rest if they cycle on off days also.

As you see, you don't have to get injured. Isn't following your own plan, fixing some biomechanical flaws, weight training, and getting adequate rest all within your control? Of course! The problem is runners get compulsive. Some really do think that the thing that keeps them from the next Olympic Trials is their training plan. I've always said that a great distance runner isn't only physically gifted but very smart. The smart ones will do what is best for them and not only listen to their bodies but their brains. The injured ones are those who let the compulsions override the body and brain.