

The Healthy Runner: 10 Tips to Keep You on the Road

There's nothing like going for a run to clear your mind, decrease your stress, maintain or lose weight, and stay fit. But injuries have been known to sideline all runners, from the elite to the casual. Luckily, there are ways to avoid those pesky problems so you can keep moving forward.

1. Have proper shoes. A shoe is not just a shoe. Be sure you have running shoes, not cross trainers or tennis shoes. And only use them for running. Your shoes should be replaced every 500 miles because when the cushioning breaks down, running is harder on the joints. Make sure they fit well, and get custom orthotics if you have a running imbalance.
2. Warm up the right way. Static stretching (holding your stretches for 20-30 seconds) is no longer the proper method for warming up. Dynamic stretching is in: this means jogging slowly for 10-15 minutes before getting down to business.
3. Train smart. We live in a world of instant gratification, so we expect to get things faster. But by slowly building your mileage, you can avoid overuse injuries. The general rule of thumb is to increase your mileage by no more than 10% per week. Be sure to incorporate hills, speed work, weights and cross-training into your program. Run on soft surfaces when possible.
4. Good running form. Make sure you land flat footed under your center of gravity. Swing your arms back and forth without raising your shoulders. Don't slouch or clench your fists.
5. Cool down. Walk to keep your blood from pooling. And here's where static stretches can be done. It will help keep your muscles flexible.
6. Hydrate. Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after your run, especially if your run lasts longer than 60 minutes. Dehydration and heat stroke are considered running injuries, too!
7. Eat well. There's no doubt that running burns a lot of calories. But it isn't a ticket to eat all the chocolate, fast food and snacks you want. Carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, protein and fat are important to your diet. And on the flip side, running to lose weight also means you can't drastically cut your calories. Otherwise you won't have enough energy to run.
8. Rest. Be sure you get enough sleep every night. A good 7-8 hours of sleep will keep you alert and feeling good. Take a day or two off from running each week to give your muscles time to recover and grow stronger.
9. Listen to your body. If something hurts, don't ignore it. Find the cause, and make the proper changes so the pain goes away. If the pain persists, see your doctor.
10. Good attitude. Run for enjoyment. Make it something to look forward to because you already have enough chores to do during the day. Set achievable goals, but don't beat yourself up if you don't reach them. Running is a reward.

Running seems like such a simple activity, but as with all sports, there are pitfalls that can keep you off your feet. Keep these 10 tips in mind so you can run injury free!