



Run injury prevention

Running is a very rewarding way to keep fit. Unfortunately running is also tough on the body, as it is a high impact activity. This means the risk of injuries is quite high to all runners, from the beginner right through to the very experienced.

Injuries generally stem from -

- Biomechanical problems and related muscle imbalances,
- Inappropriate training including training loads and intensities,
- Worn out or incorrect running footwear and
- Poor recovery practices.

Fortunately, there are some simple steps you can take to help reduce the risk of injury –

Basic run injury prevention steps

1. Gradually increase training volumes - It is important to remember that with regard to running volume, more is NOT always better! Experts agree that your training load should increase a maximum of 10% each week. That is if your long run on a Sunday starts at 10km, the following week it should be 11km or if your weekly training load is 70km, the following week it should not exceed 77km. This rate should allow your body to adapt appropriately to the extra workload.
2. Alternate high intensity workouts with easy days and always 'periodise' your training. Running hard and incorporating intervals in your training is vital to running improvement. It is also equally important to run easy between the harder workout days to allow your body to recover. Recovery run pace should be 60-90sec slower per km to your interval training pace. For example, you may run 1km reps at 4min per km pace, and your recovery runs at 5-5.30min per km pace. This should allow your body to recover, adapt to your more intense workouts and develop a more efficient running economy.

While you should alternate hard and easy workout days, you should ideally follow a training plan which gradually increases your total km's run each week over a period of 5 weeks and allows for a recovery or easy week every 6th week. This 'periodisation' incorporated in your training plan allows your body to adapt to your training workloads and recover regularly – just as your hard/easy weekly training plan does.

3. Incorporate an appropriate warm up and warm down around each workout - An appropriate warm up will prepare your body for the workout ahead. This is increasingly more important for higher intensity workouts. Remember to incorporate dynamic stretches in your warm up. With regard to an appropriate warm down, you need to ensure it is adequate to reduce the risk of muscle soreness from lactic acid build up.



4. Run fast workouts at a pace according to your current level of fitness - We all have goal race paces, or times we would like to hit when running. It is important, for a properly balanced running plan, where you run your harder workouts at a pace that you can currently maintain, rather than what you ultimately want to achieve. You should gradually improve this way and still reach your goal, without the massive risk of injury - which comes through over intense training
5. Check your footwear - Your shoes are your most important piece of running equipment. Your running shoes should be replaced every 6 months as a minimum. You should not be running in shoes that have any part of their sole worn out. The fit of your shoe should be comfortable to you as soon as you put the shoes on. Do not get talked into running shoes you are not 100% comfortable in, and any gadgets you are not 100% sure of. Generally, if you have been injury free in a particular brand and style - stick with it.
6. Always try to find softer running surfaces - As running is a high intensity activity, if you are able to reduce the impact of running by selecting softer surfaces to run on, it will reduce the impact for your body with each step. Avoiding concrete and roads are the priority here – with grass as the optimal surface.
7. Incorporate strength training - Incorporating strength training into your training regimen can enhance your performance by helping you maintain a stronger muscular skeletal structure. By identifying weaknesses in our biomechanics and movements, you can focus on strengthening those areas to run stronger.
8. Practice good recovery techniques including a weekly rest day - Avoiding injury while following a structured running plan relies heavily on an appropriate recovery plan. Properly structured training is designed to load the body, break muscle down, allow the body to rest, recover, adapt, strengthen and then result in performance improvement. Without the rest and recover process you will continue to break muscle down and develop injuries. Recovery includes sleep (8 hours a night optimal), stretching, ice baths and other activities that allow your specific running muscles to basically have some time off.
9. Eat well - If you fuel your body appropriately you will be able to get more from it. Stay away from low nutritious foods such as lollies, chocolates and junk or fast foods. Your nutritional needs are as individual as you are and should be adapted to your own needs. What you eat will also aid your recovery. You can improve your recovery by eating a mix of carbohydrates and proteins within 30-40 minutes after a hard workout. Carbs will help replace decreased glycogen stores to provide energy to your muscles, while protein will help repair your muscle tissue. Eating immediately following your workouts and restoring your fluid levels by rehydrating will better prepare you for your next workout and help get the most out of your training.