

Benefits of Cross-Training for Runners

By Dr. Jon DeGorter, DC



As the weather turns cooler and there may be less days to run outdoors, runners should consider adding cross-training to their routine. Including alternative exercise modes can make you a stronger, more flexible, and well-rounded athlete. Non-impact workouts will not only reduce your risk of injury but also improve your overall performance by increasing aerobic fitness, power, and efficiency. And in addition to improved fitness and endurance, while giving your overused muscles and joints a rest, cross-training helps your motivation by rejuvenating the mind and body from training ruts. Supplement your running with strength training, flexibility exercises, and non-impact endurance sports such as bicycling

and swimming and reap the benefits:

Fewer Injuries

Doing the same workout and using the same muscles inevitably leads to overuse injury. Runners solely focused on reaching a speed or distance goal may push their skills and overtrain. This can lead to injuries that sideline you and halt your progress. Instead of stressing the same joints and muscles over and over, cross-training engages a variety of muscle groups.

By replacing recovery runs with easy non-impact workouts such as bicycling, swimming or pool running, you reduce the cumulative amount of impact on your legs, hips, and feet, and thereby reduce injuries without sacrificing fitness.

Increase Running Fitness

Another benefit of cross-training is greater aerobic capacity. When you increase speed or distance, you should stick to the 10% rule, which limits how much more you can train each week. When you switch to a different exercise it allows you greater training volume, which increases your stamina without overusing the muscles, joints and tendons used in running. By expanding your aerobic capacity over time you will find that your stamina improves overall. Replacing a recovery run with a non-impact exercise can increase efficiency, strength, and power, without additional breakdown, fatigue or injury.

Stronger Overall

For runners who focus on endurance or speed, strength training often provides a boost in performance. Everyone can benefit from incorporating resistance training into your routine. You'll improve your performance more than running alone. Many running injuries are caused by instability in the hips, knees, and ankles due to weakness in the stabilizing muscles. Strength training to address specific weaknesses will alleviate the stress on joints and tendons. Strength training, especially jumping drills and plyometrics, helps increase stride length which translates into less ground contact and consequently less injury and faster race times.

Develop Flexibility

Dynamic stretching movements enhance performance by mimicking the way your muscles and connective tissues actually stretch during running. Performed regularly it reduces the internal resistance in the muscles and joints used in your running movements, which will increase the efficiency of your stride.

By working different muscle groups, cross-training also helps develop greater dynamic flexibility overall. When you perform a new exercise, a whole new set of joints, ligaments and muscles are stretched out, which increases flexibility throughout your body. This increased flexibility and reduced internal resistance in your muscles and connective tissues make your body able to adapt and respond faster as you run.

Heal Faster

Cross-training enables your body to recuperate faster from injuries, and in some cases, the alternative exercises directly improve the condition caused by your running activity. The best alternatives that most closely simulate the action and demands of running are pool running, elliptical training, bicycling, and inline skating. You should be able to maintain your conditioning if you can approximate the volume and intensity of your running workouts, without the impact of running that would exacerbate an injury.

Jonas Chiropractic Sports Injury Care

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Active Release Technique® involves intense active movement-based massage treatments, which sets it apart from passive massage techniques and physical therapy treatment. **ART®** promotes faster recovery, restoration of normal tissue function and helps prevent injury by reducing scar-tissue build-up and promoting ideal muscle length through the healing process. While other therapies can provide relief, **ART®** combined with specific stretching and exercise heals the tissue in the shortest time with the lowest incidence of re-injury.

Dr. Jon DeGorter is the USATF-Long Island Chair of the Sports Medicine Committee, and part of the Jonas Chiropractic Sports Injury Care team. Dr. Jon specializes in treating runners and triathletes — keeping athletes doing what they love to do.