

5 Running Myths Debunked.

Ghostwritten blog for fitness client

Running is an activity enjoyed by millions of people the world over, and like any sport it has a lot of lore and myth surrounding it. Some of these are perpetuated by runners themselves, while others probably endure because they seem like common sense. But all of these myths making the rounds are just that--myths. Let's take a look at a few of these common myths about running and why they just aren't true

1. You'll End Up With Arthritis or Runner's Knee

Conventional wisdom says that running is hard on the knee joints, wearing down the cartilage that protects them and eventually leading to arthritis and possibly knee replacement surgery. However, recent studies show that runners may experience less arthritis than their sedentary counterparts. The villain, when it comes to knee (and hip) injury related to running, is improper form. Improper form can lead to injury as the body compensates, and it can also cause so-called 'runner's knee.'

The medical terminology for this condition is patellofemoral pain syndrome and it is caused by irritation at the point where the kneecap (patella) rests against the thigh bone. Symptoms are generally pain around and behind the patella which improve with rest, correcting problems with form, and not running too much.

Running is good exercise that won't tax your knees more than most sports, as long as you are running with good form and don't allow bad habits to sneak into your stride.

2. Running on Grass or Dirt Is Better Than Pavement

This is another commonly held belief that even doctors will often get wrong. It seems intuitively correct to surmise that you place less pressure and stress on your joints when you run on grass or packed dirt rather than the sidewalk or pathway. Though the jury is still not unanimous on this largely because of the difficulty of designing studies to measure it, there seems to be growing evidence that the body adjusts adequately to whatever type of surface you are running on. Just as jumping from a certain height causes you to land with bent knees without even thinking about it, it appears that if you run on hard surfaces your body can adjust to it and there is not an increase in running-related injuries.

3. Barefoot Is Better

The idea here is that when you run barefoot you are going to be striking with the balls of your feet. With shoes, most runners strike with their heels, generating force that is three times their body weight. It sounds as though running barefoot is the way to go, but it's not all that simple.

Ultimately it depends a lot on your form--sound familiar? It's true that striking with your forefoot creates less force, but running barefoot isn't necessarily going to correct your running form. The same is true of minimalist shoes that mimic the feeling and posture of being barefoot: don't rely on them to 'force' you to run with better form.

At this time there are no studies which show that show barefoot runners suffer fewer injuries, which is a common reason given for running barefoot or in minimal running shoes.

4. You Must Stretch First

The traditional rationale for stretching goes something like this: when we stretch, we are lengthening muscle tissue and that added length remains after we release the stretch. Over time, with continued stretching, we imagine that the muscle lengthens and remains lengthened, resulting in increased flexibility.

A newer theory of how stretching works offers a neurological explanation instead. When you move into a stretch, your nerves and brain send messages that you are in danger of injuring yourself, causing a feeling of discomfort or even pain. That message makes you feel what is usually called your 'edge', which is the limit of your ability to stretch that muscle without injuring yourself. Our sense of lengthening muscles comes from gradually increasing the amount of stretch we can do before our brains feel the increased sense of danger.

The understanding that muscles do not really lengthen and that any gains in flexibility are brief, coupled with some studies which conclude that stretching is not beneficial either in terms of performance or preventing injury, demonstrate that there is no real advantage to stretching before a run. These studies also found that muscle strength was reduced after stretching was used as a warm up.

5. You're Seriously Dehydrated

For most runners, dehydration seldom becomes a serious issue. One exception to this would be long distance and marathon runners, but few civilians have a need for fluids that approaches this level. There are relatively few studies on the effects of water on the human body as a system. Instead, they tend to look at the effect on a particular organ. The amount of water any individual runner needs to consume is going to depend on their diet, body type, environment, and general activity level.

Also watch out for sports drinks. Unless you are training very long and hard, depleting your body's store of glycogen, they are really just sugary beverages that you don't need.

Now that you know myths from fact get out there and have a great run!

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