



Eight Running Myths-Busted

Whether you are brand new to running or are an experienced racer, there are a number of "myths" associated with training, rest, strengthening and diet that you should be aware of. While these things may not necessarily cause issues, putting a bunch together could lead to poor runs or nagging injuries that keep you from running altogether.

Myth 1: Stretch Before You Run

Stretching is important for all athletes. You want to make sure that you have full range of motion and mobility of your joints to enhance your performance, but there is a time and a place. A number of recent studies have shown that static stretching (holding a stretch for a period of time) can be detrimental prior to athletic performance. Static stretching is best to do after your run when your muscles are good and warm. Instead, prior to a run warm up with dynamic movements like walking lunges, butt kicks, high knees. Keep in mind that overly flexible joints are less stable, which makes them more prone to being overstretched. So you don't need the flexibility of an Olympic Gymnast to be a good runner. What you need in addition to normal mobility is stable joints with strong muscles surrounding them to keep everything in place.

Myth 2: Runners Shouldn't Lift Weights or Don't Have To Lift Weights

Although running does help a little with leg strength, it doesn't do enough on its own to replace it. Running uses very specific muscles and very limited joint mobility and in order to avoid nagging injuries, having a well balanced strength training program a few times per week can help keep you running. Working your arms is just as important as your legs too. Your legs can only pump as fast as your arms pump. Trying running a sprint with no arm pump and see what happens.

Myth 3: Barefoot Running or Toe Running Is The Best

Christopher McDougall's book *Born to Run* gave a huge spark to the barefoot/minimalist running craze. While barefoot running has been reported to help some people, it's not for everyone. If you want to give minimalist shoes a try, you need to do so gradually and build up the leg strength to do it. Try walking in the shoes first to get used to them before your try to run and then try wearing them only on your short runs. The same goes with forefoot or toe running. Some people are just fine as heel strikers and never have any injuries or issues at all. To transition to forefoot running is a skill that needs to be taught and practiced before you use it running. If you choose to make this your new running pattern without proper education and training it can lead to lower leg injuries for sure. Make sure you have the right strength before you try it and don't expect to instantly transition.



Myth 4: Building Mileage Makes You A Better Runner

Many runners are only concerned with their weekly mileage and think that's the measure of a true runner. However, what you do while running those miles is sometimes more important than the actual number of miles that you run. Running 5-6 miles a day at the same pace multiple times per week is fine, but if you really want to improve your performance and your fitness, add in some tempo runs, hill work and speed work. Varying the intensity and the mileage during your workouts will help you make greater performance gains than running at the same pace and distance every day.

Myth 5: Run Every Day

Running every day is not necessary; in fact it can be harmful and lead to overtraining, burnout and injury. Instead, incorporate cross-training (i.e., swimming, biking, elliptical machine, rowing) into your routine. Many athletes find that they perform best if they take at least one day off from training each week, while other athletes do better with two rest days each week. Experiment during training and see what works best for you.

Myth 6: Sports Drinks Are Necessary For Proper Hydration

With so many different beverages on the market and the warnings about staying hydrated, grabbing a sports drink seems like a good choice. But it's not necessarily the correct choice. If your workout is less than one hour long, there's no need to consume a sports drink which can be full of calories. Choose water for those shorter workouts. If your workout is longer than an hour, then having a sports drink to replace calories and electrolytes lost during training isn't such a bad idea.

Myth 7: Carbo Load Before That Race

Many athletes think they need to carb load before an event. The truth is, unless your event is longer than two hours, there's no need to alter your diet in any way. If your event is over two hours, it's beneficial to increase your carbohydrate consumption in the week leading up to the race; not the night before! Instead of stuffing yourself at the pre-race pasta dinner, eat something you've had during training so that you know it won't upset your stomach.

Myth 8: Running Is Bad For Your Knees

Not only is running not bad for your knees, recent studies have shown that running is actually beneficial to the cartilage and bone structure of the knee. Epidemiological studies of long-term runners show that they generally are less likely to develop osteoarthritis in the knees than people of the same age who do not run. Now, don't take that to mean if you have damage that running will reverse it!