

Sound advice for beginning runners

By Judith A. Faruquee

Running is as natural as walking, yet today this fundamental act is elevated to both a mystique and a source of controversy.

Is running - around the block, around the campus, around Boston on a 26.2 mile jaunt - good for you?

"Yes and no," says Bud Smitley, athletic director for Penn State, Capitol Campus. "There are hazards, but they can be avoided by following some good common sense."

The first universal rule is to have a physical examination if you are overweight, have health problems, or are over 35 years old. Of course, if you have not had a medical checkup within a year, at any age, it's a good idea to start with one.

Smitley advises new runners, "to start out slow and not be overambitious, not to try running ten miles the first week."

A good way to initiate a running program is to start out by walking, since few people are capable of running continuously for any distance.

Smitley recommends taking the walk test. "If you can comfortably walk three miles in 45 minutes, it is okay to start running. Better yet, alternate running and walking continuously



for 20 minutes," he says, adding: "When conditioned, a prescribed regimen is four times a week for 30 minutes. It is not the speed, but the amount of time spent in the activity for your body to begin realizing the effects of sustained vigorous exercise.

"If your output is the best to your ability, benefits to your heart and lungs will be achieved. The intensity depends on the ability of the person and that person knows what's intense for him."

The "training effect" refers to the improved physical capacity resulting from regular exertion—such as swimming, stretching, running—that makes a person's body stronger, more flexible, or better able to use oxygen.

Cathy Clark, President of the Harrisburg Road Runners Club, has a wellspring of sound advice for beginning runners. One of the first things she recommends is to get a good book on the subject. Here are titles of some: **Running's Being the Total Experience** by Dr. George Sheehan; **The Complete Book of Running** by James F. Fixx; **JOY OF RUNNING** by Thaddeus Kostrubala.

One nice thing about running is that no equipment is required. But a good pair of running shoes are a must, advises Clark. "They should be fitted properly at the time of purchase. The proper fit will allow space in front of the toe to avoid hitting the shoe each time the foot comes down on the pavement."

Allen Newhart, team member of the Penn State C.C. Cross Country, likes a store that lets him try the running shoes on—then go outside with them to run in. Greg Sloditskie, his teammate, says, "Running shoes have to have stability and flexibility, be cushioned and able to absorb shock. Shoes are very personal."

Next in order, are slow stretch exercises. "These are not the bouncy type done in aerobics classes," says Clark, "but a process of elongating the muscle and then relaxing it."

A lot of injuries in running—stress fractures, shin splints, sciatica, come from poor preparation and overuse. Back and knee problems may be aggravated by heavy running. As Coach Smitley said, "A person who takes up running will find out just how imperfect his body is."

Clark doesn't advocate "pushing on an injury—it will take that much longer to get rid of it." Ice and/or heat is used for many injuries. The trick is to know which to use when. A doctor knows best.

"The first month for beginners is a chore," said Clark, "after that, running becomes a necessity. You become addicted to it. The body gets used to a new level of stress and it responds to it." Clark, who runs regularly 5 miles a day from work, knowingly makes the claim that "one of the best outcomes of running is the knowledge you are doing something that's good for you. It raises your self-esteem. It also raises the metabolism. If you stay on the same diet—you will lose weight. Some women who have had dysmenorrhea noticed a reduction in pain and a decrease in flow.

Dr. Paul Herley, a past president of Harrisburg Road Runners Club, is a ten-mile-a-day man. The advice he heeds follows the philosophy of many long distance runners. He never takes a watch with him to avoid measuring himself against a clock.

"As a novice runner, I expected some pain and therefore concentrated on enjoying the work, rather than thinking of the discomfort," Herley said, adding: "When I run I just enjoy the scenery and think. It's not a question of having time, I set the time aside. You don't have to go somewhere to run—you can run everywhere. You can run in the rain and in the cold."

Herley had a useful hint for running in cold weather. "Start out by running into the wind, it will make you perspire, and have the wind at your back when finishing, it will cool you, and push you. To have it the other way around would be detrimental." Reflecting on his hobby Dr. Herley said, "While it may be good for me to run, it may not be good for my limbs. That will take a number of years to know."

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Women runners have a particular disadvantage when they head for the open roads and that's the problem of harassment from motorists and passersby. Clark has found that it is best for a woman not to show fear—it may be a big turn-on for the man. On the other hand, if your would-be harassers are a group of young boys, looking them in the eye and saying good morning, may keep that nasty remark from



being said. The best prevention for harassment is to be aware of what is going on. Don't wear earphones which cut out sounds, do run on heavily traveled roads, don't run alone at night, and if you're being followed, never lead the person to your home.

An enemy of both male and female runners is heat. Cold doesn't cause nearly as much of a problem. Signs of heat exhaustion are when sweating has stopped on a hot day, the face is flushed and thinking is incoherent. To avoid heat exhaustion do not run during hot, humid days. Schedule running in early morning and late evening hours advises Clark.

For winter jogging, Clark chooses tights, shorts, warm socks, T-shirt and an all-weather running nylon suit. Do not wear rubber suits. Clark has to have her hands and ears covered where she feels the effects of the cold most. Wearing a hat in the cold helps keep the heat of your body from escaping through your head. Dr. Herley, who likes to run rain or shine, suggests layering articles of clothing that aren't too bulky to begin with. As a veteran of 20 marathons, Herley doesn't wait for a fair weather report.

As the well-known runner and philosopher Dr. George Sheenan put it, "The weakest among us can become some kind of athlete, but only the strongest can survive as spectators."