

# Mandatory Pit Stop

It's time for a tune up!

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Several months ago I had scheduled a workout with my friend Carmen. Carmen is a pretty intense triathlete who never misses a workout. On this particular day however, she was over 20 minutes late and I was beginning to worry. My fears were confirmed when the door swung open and she came hobbling in. Her track pants were torn and her body was covered with scrapes and bruises.

"What happened to you?" I asked in a panic.

"I had to stop short going downhill and ended up going over the handlebars on my bike" she explained.

"Well are you okay?" I asked, "Let's get you to a hospital."

"I'll be okay, but my poor bike. I'm going to take it in for a tune-up tomorrow" she replied. "So, are you ready to workout?"

Ah, the mind of an athlete is a fascinating place sometimes isn't it? We'll run on sprained ankles and injured knees, but the second that our bikes feel even slightly out of alignment, we're ready to declare a state of emergency!

Well I'm also officially declaring a state of emergency...on you! That's right, on you pal...or more specifically on your body. If you're like most endurance athletes; you've probably ignored your body's warning signals for way too long.

And while you may look good and train hard now, even the sleekest Ferrari will crash at some point if the wheels are out of alignment and never get corrected.

Of course, before you can figure out what needs to be corrected, you'll first have to determine what's wrong. Sounds simple right? But many of us have been working out injured for so long that we don't even remember what it's like to feel normal.

So with that said, the following is a simple 3 point inspection to determine whether you'll need to start training smarter instead of just training harder.

**Balance** – Among other things, balance is important for maintaining your stride and staying on course while running. As we get older our balance begins to deteriorate so it's important to begin working on it now. To test your balance, first stand on a flat, stable surface next to a wall. Raise your right leg off of the ground with your knee bent to 90 degrees. Hold this position for 30 seconds then repeat with the other leg. If you're able to complete this challenge, fold a towel or an exercise mat several times until it's two to four inches thick. Perform the same leg raise challenge while standing on the mat. If you're able to complete this challenge, step back to the flat surface and repeat the leg raise challenge one final time with your eyes closed. If you can hold this position for more than 15 seconds, you have excellent balance and body awareness. If you shake, wobble and fall after a few seconds, all is not lost. Balance is influenced by many factors including sleep, focus and concentration so you may just need to get a good night's sleep. If you have the same results the next morning however, you'll want to work on strengthening your core and controlling your breathing since these factors also play a critical role in keeping your body stable. Also consider taking yoga and incorporating single leg movements into your strength training routine.

**Alignment and Muscular Imbalances** – If your body is out of alignment or there is a major difference in strength between the right and left side of your body, this may also cause a lot of major problems down the line.

Here is an easy way that I simultaneously pinpoint several muscular imbalances in my clients. First lie completely flat on your back with your legs outstretched and relaxed. Keep your hands out to the side as you'll want complete dead weight on the floor. Now stand up however you'd like. Lie back down and repeat this sequence 4 more times. Take note of the natural movement patterns that your body defaults to. Did you cross one leg over the other? Did you collapse to one side? Did you assist yourself off of the floor with your right arm? If you did any of these things, lie back down and try to perform the opposite movement pattern 5 times. For example, if you assisted yourself off of the floor with your right hand, try using your left, or if you cross your right leg over the left, reverse this pattern. If it was significantly more difficult using the opposite side of your body, you may have a muscular imbalance.

In some cases the imbalance is a result of daily activities outside of the gym. For example someone who carries a heavy bag on the same shoulder each day may develop more strength on that side. Someone who does a lot of gardening and only uses their dominant arm to control the shovel may also develop imbalanced strength.

Take a look at the soles of your shoes. Do they wear evenly or on a slant? If they're slanted, your alignment and stride may also need to be corrected in order for you to realize your full athletic potential. Consider scheduling an appointment with a physical therapist or trainer to have a movement assessment screen and gait assessment performed to help you determine how to correct these issues before they become more severe.

**Flexibility** – I'm often surprised how many athletes skip warming up and stretching properly after training. Odds are that if you're not flexible, you already know it. Can you touch your toes? Can you perform a basic cobra yoga position? If your answer was "no" for either of these questions, you'll definitely need to work on your flexibility.

Stiff, rigid muscles place you at greater risk for injury and feed into the aforementioned muscular imbalance and alignment issues. Tight hips lead to sore backs, bad knees and ankle injuries.

Consider enrolling into a yoga class, going for a deep tissue massage and learning how to use a foam roller. All of these things will help to keep you injury free and off of the shelf.



*Darrell W. Butler has trained, managed and consulted for fitness centers and media outlets around the world. When he's not training a client or sharing his words of wisdom, you can catch him drinking a PFC Berries A'More Recovery Shake at his local gym's juice bar! For more information visit the Darrell Butler Personal Training website at [www.dbptonline.com](http://www.dbptonline.com)*

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