

June 2016 | mapmyrun.com | Mackenzie Lobby | Exercise

[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

The 5 Worst Habits of Runners

Research suggests that 37–56% of runners end up with an injury each year. If you're a runner, this statistic probably doesn't surprise you because you've probably been hurt before.

But running and injury don't have to go hand in hand.

Many sport-specific ailments are avoidable with a careful and calculated training routine. The first rule of thumb: The plan you follow should be tailored to your individual needs as a runner. What works for your running buddy may not work for you.

But beyond picking the right race-prep plan, you can increase your risk for injury if you neglect certain preventative measures. Here are the top-five worst habits the majority of runners are guilty of, and the research-backed reasons you should stop doing these things if you want to run injury-free for months and years to come:

1. You do more than your body can handle.

Studies state that anywhere from half to three-quarters of running injuries are related to the repetitive motion of the sport. Overuse injuries are simply a casualty of running more miles than your body can withstand. For many runners, this means ramping up mileage too quickly. Coaches generally instruct their athletes to abide by the 10% rule, which keeps them from increasing their mileage by more than 10% from one week to the next.

2. You don't complete hip-strengthening exercises.

Doing a bit of supplementary strength work in addition to your run training can make a world of difference when it comes to injury prevention. In particular, research has shown that hip strength is of the utmost importance. One study found that when the hip strength of a group of runners with various leg injuries was compared to that of a group of healthy runners, the ailing harriers demonstrated strength imbalances and the healthy ones did not. When certain muscles are weak, others have to pick up the slack—this can overwork the stronger muscles, leading to increased inflammation and often injury. To be sure, a review of related research found that while foot mechanics didn't increase the risk of injuries, weakness in the hip-stabilizing muscles caused atypical lower-extremity mechanics and injuries in turn.

3. You always run on the same surface.

Research has begun to show that variability in the way you run from one foot strike to the next can help you skirt injuries. While there are numerous ways to achieve this, switching up your training terrain is perhaps the easiest. By



running on pavement one day, grass the next and single-track (trails) the next, you activate slightly different muscles and avoid overloading any particular muscles. What's more, getting off-road a couple days a week is a good method by which to avoid the jarring nature of constant pavement pounding.

4. You wear the trendiest, and not necessarily the most comfortable, running shoes.

Some of the most prominent research regarding running footwear suggests that comfort is the most important factor we should consider when choosing shoes and insoles. While one shoe may look great on paper, if it isn't comfortable, forget about it. Be sure to try on several pairs of shoes and choose the ones that feel most natural on your feet when you're running. Also remember to replace those kicks every 300–500 miles, since the cushioning and stability break down over time.

There is also some research that suggests rotating a couple of pairs of shoes through training can decrease your risk of injury, so if you can find more than one type of shoe that suits you, it may be worth swapping pairs every other day.

5. You skip rest days.

Wise coaches will tell you that rest is part of the training, not the absence of it. Indeed, studies have demonstrated the importance of rest and recovery days. These days allow the body to bounce back and absorb all of your hard training. Conversely, if you relentlessly stress your body day in and day out, you'll end up running yourself right to the bench for the rest of the season.

If there's only one piece of advice you are going to follow, it should be this: Listen to your body. If you're feeling unusually fatigued or you have a nagging ache that won't subside, take a couple of days and get it checked out. Catching potential injuries early is the key to longevity in the sport.

Learn more at simpleagain.com