

## Stay injury free - 10 top tips

I love running. I love the way it makes me feel. I love running in the morning, I love running at night. I love running in the snow - the crunch under my feet on every stride. I love running in the cold, the wind and the rain, it makes me feel so much warmer when I get in. I love being able to eat cake when I want to.

I love running up hill, the hard slog to the top made worthwhile by the view and I love running back down again. I love running in races... once I've crossed the finish line. I love that I can go out with the devil on my back and come home with an angel on my shoulder.

There is only one thing I don't love about running - injuries! I hate injuries. I hate that I could have avoided them and didn't. I hate having unscheduled, enforced rest. Injuries can mean time away from running. Injuries can mean pain and expense. Injuries are frustrating and time consuming. Injuries mess with your head as well as your body.



### Always listen to your body

We all come with this inbuilt, always ready early warning system. We tend to use the override switch a lot. Our bodies are very good at telling - we just have to learn to listen. If you are feeling below par, have a cold, are in pain or just need to rest - listen to your body, it's not laziness, it is injury prevention. One day missed will not make a lot of difference to your running, ignore and you may miss days or even weeks from your schedule.

### Never miss a rest day

Don't feel guilty having rest days. These are part of your training schedule and just as important as your mid-week tempo run or long, slow Sunday run. Your muscles need time to recover, time to re-build and be stronger for your next run.

### Use the running log in runABC North

Use the Running Log in runABC North. It is a very useful tool. Keep a note of your mileage and record how you feel, what you did, where you went. A training log is a great motivator when you start running. When you feel you are not improving, still finding running hard, look back a couple of months and just see how far you have come. When you have an injury, check back in your log, you may find a trigger or be able to pinpoint when or how it started even though, at the time, it may not have seemed significant. If nothing else, in years to come, your old training logs will provide endless amusement - mine do!

### Warm up properly

Something that should have a very high priority is your warm up. Everyone has a different idea about warming up. It could be a walk, a gentle jog, some dynamic stretches. A warm up is just as important for your head as your body. It gets you in the mood for your run, gives you time to focus and anticipate the run ahead. A good rule of thumb - the shorter the run, the longer the warm up.

### Make sure your shoes can do the job

Shoes, oh here we go again. I know it sounds like a sales pitch. Running shoes really do have a limited life span. They really do break down. How long do they last? Unfortunately that can vary from runner to runner. It depends on how much running you do, where you run, how heavy you are, how you run. Rule of thumb is about 500 miles. Start thinking about your new shoes between 350 and 400 miles then you have time to see what you need. Have a look round and compare different brands. Take your time, don't buy your new shoes in a hurry.

### Take care in the sun

As runners we all spend a lot of time out of doors and we should always consider sun damage to our skin and eyes. Not exactly an injury and not really going to stop you from running as such but sunburn can be dangerous. It can cause permanent skin damage; even on cloudy days our skin is at risk from harmful rays. Consider wearing a light weight long sleeved tee, more and more manufacturers are giving their clothing UV protection ratings. Invest in a good sunscreen, pick a sports sunscreen that is water resistant so it doesn't run off when you sweat. If you don't like wearing sun glasses, wear a peaked running cap to protect your eyes.

### Take preventative measures

One important preventative measure is a regular session with a physio even if you feel 100%. My physio is called Jan and I have an annual 'MOT' at the start of the year. Last year it was the only time I went to see her. This year I have already been back for a treatment - not an injury as such but a pre-emptive strike!

The best time to find a physio is right now when you don't need one. Ask around for recommendations from other runners or sports people. Most running shops will know of one or two in your area.

### Beat the stitch

More an irritant than an injury issue, stitches can often curtail a run. Clench your fist and press it into the side with the pain, lean towards that side and slow the pace, exhale deeply. Breathing techniques, food, posture and lack of core strength are a few of the suggested causes of stitches.

Try to get into a rhythm for your breathing. If you exhale on opposite foot strikes this will help to stop continually favouring one side (usually the right side). I run with an odd numbered routine. On warm up I breath in for 4 foot strikes and out for 3. On an easy run I do 3 in and 2 out. A fast run is 2 and 1. Eating too close to a run or not eating at all can also cause a stitch (usually the left side).

### Sports massage

Sports massage is a great way to ease off tight muscles and promote recovery.

Massage, applied skillfully, is the most effective therapy for releasing muscle tension and restoring balance to the musculo-skeletal system. Received regularly this may help athletes prevent injuries, which might otherwise be caused by overuse.

### Do something else

Cross training is one of the best ways to prevent injury. Introduce a gym session, weights, swimming, cycling or nordic walking into your training programme. Your body will thank you.

article by Fiona Ross

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