



Moore Health Physiotherapy Preventing Running Injuries

Whether you are involved in sport, taking part in casual exercise or you are an elite athlete, running is one of the leading participation sports in Australia (Exercise, Recreation & Sport Survey 2006 Annual Report). Along with sports like basketball, volleyball, netball, tennis and football, running is classified as a 'high impact activity'—in that it requires both feet to leave the ground simultaneously.

As with all high impact sports, running has a broad range of associated health benefits including:

- 1) Increasing fitness, endurance, agility and co-ordination
- 2) Building bone strength
- 3) Increasing muscle strength
- 4) Increased feeling of personal wellbeing

However, although running is undoubtedly one of the best and most convenient ways to keep fit, its 'high impact' nature has the potential to make it the cause of a wide range of injuries.

Running and Injury

The most common types of running injuries can be classified into two broad categories:

1. Start-Up Injuries

Essentially running start-up injuries involve going too far, too fast, too soon. For the beginner (or returning runner) it is very important to allow ample time to increase both your physiological (heart, lung etc) and physical (muscles, joints) capacity gradually. A common mistake for the new runner is to try and 'run through' pain that they are experiencing, rather than recognising that the pain may be their body's early warning system of an imminent injury!

2. Overuse/Accumulative Injuries

There are three common reasons for runners to end up with an accumulative injury: overtraining; failing to allow adequate recovery time between runs; and ignoring small, niggling pains. Statistics released by Smartplay (Victoria, 2007) indicate that in a 12 month period up to 70% of recreational and competitive runners will sustain an overuse injury. Of these, 42% will be of the knee, 17% to the foot/ankle, 13% to the lower leg and 11% to the hip/pelvis.

Getting the Most from Your Running!

A large number of running injuries are preventable. Here are some simple guidelines that can help you maximise the health benefits of running, whilst minimising the chance of injury.

1. **Essential Assessment:** Prior to commencing any running programme it is very important that you consult a suitably qualified health professional, such as a physiotherapist, in order to identify any musculoskeletal or health problems that may contribute to injury. Knowing your body's strengths and limitations will greatly assist in tailoring a running programme

that minimises the change of injury whilst also meeting your health and fitness needs.

2. **Warm Up and Warm Down:** A thorough warm up and warm down (including a range of stretches) should be undertaken each time you run.
3. **Allow Time for Rest and Recovery:** Appropriate rest is critical to both performance gains and injury prevention.
4. **Hydration, Hydration, Hydration:** Drink plenty of water before, during, and after your runs.
5. **Don't Ignore Pain:** Listen to your body and if you are experiencing pain in your joints or muscles whilst running, stop and walk. Consider seeking professional help for the pain — the solution may simply be a matter of adding some additional strengthening or flexibility exercises to your running routine!
6. **Remember your Feet:** Healthy feet are your key to running performance, protecting your feet can be helped with high quality running shoes. Many different factors will affect what type of running shoe is best for you and how often you will need to change your running shoe. Consider seeking professional advice in choosing and updating your shoes.
7. **Vary Your Routine:** Consider the use of low impact 'cross training' activities such as cycling or swimming to give your joints a rest between running days.
8. **Running Surface:** Wherever possible, run on a clear, smooth, even, and relatively forgiving surface.