

What next?

If you're looking to move your running routine up a gear, there are a few golden rules to follow for ultimate running success, writes Tatyana Leonov

It's good news to get serious about running. Running is highly beneficial to health — it provides a fantastic cardiovascular workout, strengthens and tones muscles, and myriad studies demonstrate that running can reduce your chances of falling prey to everything from the common cold to cancer.

Mark Green, a physiotherapist who runs The Body Mechanic (www.thebodymechanic.com.au) in Sydney's Milsons Point, says we are engineered to run. "According to evolutionary scientists, the reason we have an Achilles tendon and an iliotibial band (ITB) is to make us efficient runners," he says. "We have been running for two million years, chasing animals and picking plants, so for those people who say running isn't good for your knees, I would say sitting in a chair for 40 hours a week isn't good for your knees. Running is great for your knees — as long as you do it properly."

Run right

The way you run is crucial to success and injury avoidance. The correct running technique will see a runner excel in marathons, while the wrong technique can bring on injuries and pain.

According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Collage of Sports Medicine*, around three quarters of people who run with poor technique will suffer an overuse injury each year, which will hinder them from running for a significant amount of time. Learning the correct running technique straight off is ideal, but since most people start running before they see an expert, learning to change running technique is good too — as long as the right approach is taken.

Green makes a point of discussing running shoes with clients during the

transition phase of changing running technique, and writes out a program that ensures they don't overdo it or cause an injury.

According to Andy DuBois, founder of Mile 27 (www.mile27.com.au), running coach and strength and conditioning coach for runners, "Many injuries can be prevented and performance increased simply by improving technique." He does, however, caution runners to seek out expert advice, as changing running technique places different stresses on the muscles and must be done gradually to allow the body to adapt.

"I know of many people who tried running barefoot or changed their footwear to minimalist running shoes in order to change their technique, only to suffer calf and Achilles injuries," says DuBois.

Which expert?

Choosing an expert is not a straightforward task. Who do you see? How do you find the right expert? Do you even need an expert? Green says you do. "Would you buy Roger Federer's tennis racket, read about the perfect forehand topspin shot and expect to have perfected your tennis game? Or would you consult an expert coach and get taught the correct technique?" he asks.

You should look for a specialist who can access your body — its strength, flexibility, core stability and range of movement. Then the expert should be able to recommend a specific training regime that should result in a more efficient run.

Green also recommends finding an expert who runs. "I think this is vital. All the theory in the world can't make a non-runner understand how a runner thinks," he says. And he suggests finding an expert who has C,

Putting the "fun" in fun run

The world is full of fun and quirky runs. Here are just a few to start you thinking about your next event.

The Stampede

www.thestampede.com.au

The name gives it away. Think mud (lots of it), obstacles, giant slides and more. Held across a number of locations in Australia on different dates.

The Forrest Half Marathon Trail Run

www.southernexposure.com.au/forrest-trail-run/

A new run for 2013, it's 21km of gorgeous trail through the Otway Ranges, near Forrest in Victoria. There's also a 7km option around the West Barwon Dam.

The Warrior Dash

www.wariordash.com

The world's largest running series has races scheduled in Vic, SA, WA and NSW, as well as New Zealand. Signing up gets you a fuzzy warrior helmet and the pride that comes with being a warrior.

Transcaledonian Race

Why not escape the winter gloom in July and take a short flight to New Caledonia for the Transcaledonian Race? This run/trek is heaven for runners who like spectacular scenery; the route has been designed with the help of the Melanesian local tribes and provides a richness of animal and plant life to check out as you run.



Pick up the pace



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a sport medical background.

The type/s of expert you should see will depend on your regime and goals. For example, at a competition level, Olympic runner Ben St Lawrence sees a nutritionist, a massage therapist, physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors (for when injuries and pains don't improve) and a running-specific strength coach.

Andy DuBois says one of the biggest areas that runners neglect is strength training. "Strength training is a proven performance enhancer and, if done correctly, can reduce running-related injuries," he explains.

For someone who is just looking for a change or an improvement to his or her routine, working with a running coach could be the answer. For Renaud Herington, a commercial property manager, working with a running coach and running squad was the biggest progression factor. He runs with run squad SWEAT Sydney (www.sweatsydney.com.au), coached by Sean Williams, where he gets the opportunity to talk to other runners, other experts and other people going through the same things as him.

"You can talk to a national champion or Olympian one day, and a normal runner with great advice the next," Herington explains. "They all have a different

perspective and by using these inputs I gain valuable advice."

Nutrition

Whether you run a few times a week or you're training for a marathon, it's vital to look after your health and maintain an ideal diet in accordance to your exercise level. Sports dietitian Teri Lichtenstein sees nutrition as fuel for the body.

"Nutrition should be an integral part of any program to improve running performance," she advises. "If your running program is advanced, you will have higher energy needs as well as higher requirements for protein to aid muscle recovery."

The key to ideal nutrition is to eat the right foods based on your exercise levels and training needs. "For an advanced runner an ideal diet should consist of plenty of carbohydrates (wholegrain breads, cereals and pasta) to provide fuel for training, moderate amounts of protein to help with muscle repair, some healthy fats, and plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables to ensure an adequate supply of vitamins and minerals to maintain a healthy immune system," Lichtenstein explains.

Eating around your exercise regime is also imperative. Carbohydrates provide

energy so should be consumed an hour or two before a run (or if exercising first thing in the morning, eating a carbohydrate-rich meal the night before is advisable) and low-GI carbohydrates, such as grains, brown rice, vegetables and fruits, are best as they provide sustained energy.

After a run it's important to refuel with protein, though Lichtenstein says protein supplements are not necessary for most runners if overall energy needs are being met. Water, of course, is pivotal, especially throughout the summer months.

Stuck in a rut?

If you're stuck in a "running rut", you may just need to change what you're doing and these changes don't have to be massive. For Herington, training with running squad SWEAT Sydney made a world of difference. "The group training scenario has multiple benefits," he explains. "You train with people who are far more advanced so always hear stories that motivate you; you train harder in a group, plus success breeds success."

For Gill Stapleton, who works as the CEO of Special Olympics Australia, joining a running team completely changed her life. After initially joining charity organisation

Cantoo (www.cantoo.org.au) to run with like-minded people, Stapleton realised how much she enjoyed the experience. After it was over, a few of the group members decided to train together for their first half marathon, then they started brunching after their runs and so a social group was formed.

"Then the husbands and partners started to join us and now we have travelled internationally together and formed life-long friendships," she says. "This has been the highlight of my running. Having moved from the UK at the age of 40 it was hard to find new friends, but I found them in running."

Run solo? Join a group. Run marathons? Try shorter runs. St Lawrence suggests training with variety always in mind. "Race to work instead of just training for the sake of it," he says. "Sometimes you just need to ride the rollercoaster and wait for improvement. Eat well, sleep well, train a few days at 90 per cent."

Running events

According to Paul Williams, a scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, who runs the world's largest study of runners' health, running long-distance events is beneficial to health in the majority of cases. Some of his participants even run up to 160km per week.

Training in preparation for an occasion is also a fun way to get fit and there are plenty of national and global running events on, all catering to different levels. "I love events. They truly motivate me and help me stay on track," Stapleton says. "When I'm training for a big event I don't miss training. It keeps me focused on my health, plus I leave the office at a reasonable time and drink less."

Stapleton has now completed five international marathons in five years (Paris, New York, Berlin, London and Boston) and has run at least half a dozen half marathons. "Working in a senior role it can be easy to let work get in the way of running, and that's why I participate in overseas runs. Once I have payed for my flights I am committed financially as well as physically."

Training in preparation for a specific occasion is also a reason to get up in the morning, and the events themselves are highlights, not just in the sport, but also in life. Commitments aside, a running event can be a great source of fun. Herington has raced dressed as Santa Claus and wearing just Speedos. And sometimes just having a heap of fun really is the best way to get fit. ☺

Expert advice

Olympian and Australian 10,000m record holder and five-time Australian champion Ben St Lawrence shares his running tips.

- Set a long-term goal and some shorter-term goals. Whatever the goal, make it SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-Specific).
- Write a program (or have a running coach write it). Having a structure to follow takes a lot of the inner talk and compromise out of the equation.
- Get a professionally-fitted pair of running shoes. Don't choose the colourful, super-expensive pair, but get the pair that is best suited to your foot type and biomechanics.
- Start a training diary, blog or twitter account and tell your friends and family what you are aiming to do. This will make you accountable and provide support as you work towards your goals.
- Find running buddies. Running alone can be great for some "me" time, but having regular, organised group runs will keep you on track and can be a lot of fun.

- Complete a regular strength/flexibility and massage routine, focusing on your weak areas. This will make you a more powerful and efficient runner and will also reduce the risk of injury.
- Eat mostly fresh and healthy food, drink lots of water, replace electrolytes and have all of your pre- and post-run nutrition planned ahead of time.
- Find a beautiful place to run, even if this is just for a weekend run each week. One of the pure joys of running is being out in a beautiful landscape, soaking up the smells, views and endorphins all at the same time.
- Try to save some time. Rather than catching the bus or driving to work, is it possible to get a few runs done each week as part of your commute? This will save you time, money and mental strength, and is also good for the environment.
- Run uphill whenever you can. This is strength work in disguise and will make you a better runner. Don't push the downhill too much, just the ups.

