

# HEALTH

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## BENEFITS OF RUNNING

When you envision running, you probably will fall into one of two categories. You love it or you hate it; sometimes it is even a love/hate relationship. It's painful, tedious, and exhausting. So what makes people love it? What makes people who hate it keep doing it? It is likely that the benefits of running outweigh the hatred (if there is any).

Many runners probably begin their running program with a physical goal foremost in their minds, like losing weight or toning their legs. These are definitely some potential benefits that come from running, but they're not the only ones. One of the greatest benefits of a runner's lifestyle is that it strongly contributes to overall health in so many ways. It could even be a way to meet people or to compete with others in races. Well, the fact is, running has a lot of benefits. And here's a list of some of the best.

### **1. Win the battle of the bulge.**

Many people start running in order to win the battle of the bulge. Whether they are obese or just want to lose that last ten pounds, or even if they just want to stay at the weight they are at, approximately 60 percent of runners start running to manage their weight. Running is one of the top activities for burning fat. In fact, with the exception of cross country skiing, running burns more calories per minute than any other form of cardiovascular exercise.

### **2. Prevent muscle and bone loss.**

Our bones are made to accommodate the demands placed upon them. By sitting in front of the monitor all day many of us allow our bones to grow weaker, but by running regularly our skeleton gets the demand it needs to stay healthy. In addition to keeping our insides from aging quickly, regular, high-intensity exercise, like running, has also been proven to promote the human growth hormone, which celebrities have taken injections of for years to keep them looking young.

### **3. Fight disease.**

Running reduces the risk of stroke and breast cancer. Regular running has become a treatment option for doctors to prescribe to patients who are at a high risk, or early stages, of osteoporosis, diabetes, and hypertension. It reduces the risk of heart attacks, by strengthening the heart and lowering blood pressure. Running maintains the elasticity of arteries incredibly well because as you run your arteries expand and contract nearly three times as much as usual.

#### **4. Maintain and improve general health.**

Running is one of the best activities most people can do to improve their health. It raises HDL (or “good”) cholesterol, reduces the risk of blood clots, and encourages use of the 50 percent of your lungs that usually go unused. Running also boost the immune system by creating a higher concentration of lymphocytes (white blood cells that attack disease).

#### **5. Get confident.**

Jogging builds confidence and self-esteem like few other individual sports can. It allows the runner to defeat trial after trial, growing stronger and sure of them with each foot strike. It allows you to truly climb hills and clear obstacles. It provides a feeling of empowerment and freedom that comes with knowing that your legs and body are strong and capable. Confidence is even more a product of running for those who lose weight and gain a better self-image through running.

#### **6. Stress relief.**

This is another huge benefit of jogging. Whether by allowing you the time to think about life’s problems or time to escape them for awhile, tension easily flies by the wayside as you fly over the miles. Distance runs are great for solving headaches and problems that are nagging at you. What could be better than a three hour run all by yourself to clear your mind and allow you to pin down an answer? Speed runs are great for tearing through aggression and anger. Focus all that emotion into a few sprints and you’ll feel better in no time.

#### **7. The famous “Runner’s high.”**

Aside from just the stress relief, jogging has also been proven to improve attitude. Running, especially outside and on trails, creates a release of endorphins that can cause euphoria (runner’s high) or just a general sense of happiness. Running has been used for years to treat clinical depression and addictions of all kinds. Less tension, less depression, less fatigue, and less confusion are just a few of the changes that patients have seen after beginning a regular running program. Running gives something for them to focus on, allowing them to see something besides their depressed state or addiction.

#### **8. Train your mind.**

Along that line, running can help train the mind as much as it trains the body. By making yourself overcome the obstacles that running brings, you learn focus and determination. The will and strength that gets your body through long runs or those runs you’d much rather skip is what in turn strengthens your mind and gives you focus and determination in other areas of your life.

## 9. Improve coordination.

This may seem surprising to many who assume it is not possible to gain these types of benefits from running simply because it is such a simple sport. However, there is some coordination involved in running. Trail running which involves running on unpaved trails especially requires a great deal of coordination. The uneven surface combined with obstacles such as rocks and tree roots can make trail running quite difficult. However, runners who regularly run on these types of surfaces, quickly learn to maintain better control over their bodies to prevent tripping and stumbling while running.

## 10. Versatility.

Not many sports can be done almost anywhere with almost no gear. I'm sure the ancient Greeks would argue that even shoes and clothes aren't required, as their Olympians were quite the minimalists. Today, we just need a good pair of running shoes and off we go. From urban sidewalks to rural trails and all the real estate in between, the world is loaded with places for runners to explore. Travel a lot? There's always room in your suitcase for a pair of sneakers. The world is your gym, go re-discover it.

## STEPS TO EFFICIENT RUNNING

- **Run tall.** Gravity and weak core muscles cause many runners to “fold” in the middle when their feet land. This sitting-down movement wastes energy. Imagine that wires are attached to your shoulders, pulling you up slightly. Thrust your hips forward a bit and think “stability” when your foot hits. It's easier to run tall if you've worked your core properly.
- **Relax.** Tension in your arms, shoulders, neck, and face reduces efficiency. Arms and fingers should be loose. Unclench your hands and let your jaw jiggle.
- **Breathe right.** Your breathing should be rhythmic and deep, and you should feel your diaphragm, not your chest, doing the work. Exhale with controlled force. When you pick up the pace, don't let your breathing get shallow.
- **Land on the midfoot.** A heel-first landing is a brake. It means you're extending your leg out too far in front of your center of gravity, so it takes more energy to move forward. And it's shaky, so your muscles are working on stabilization instead of forward motion. Shorten your stride. It'll feel odd at first, like shuffling, but once you get used to it, focus on thrusting backward with force.
- **Run softly.** The louder your footfalls, the less efficiently you're running. Try running more quietly; you'll be unconsciously switching to a midfoot strike and a shorter, quicker stride.
- **Swing symmetrically.** Check your form on a treadmill in front of a mirror. If one arm is bent more than the other or swings more, you have a musculo-skeletal imbalance that can slow you down. Target the weaker side with strength and flexibility exercises.

## WARNINGS

- Always stretch after you run. It may not seem like you need to stretch after, but it helps you get rid of lactic acid, which is what makes your muscles ache! In addition, stretching your muscles will allow them to become stronger/faster. Also, by stretching after your run, you need not worry that you are stretching cold muscles. Pre-run stretching, while not inherently unsafe, is more likely to cause injury if not preceded by a warm-up.
- Don't feel pressured to continue faster than you're able. Repeat weeks and move ahead only when you feel you're ready.
- Don't skip the warm-up, and be sure to walk for a bit when you've finished, allowing your body time to cool down gradually.
- Always consume adequate amounts of fluids before, after, and during (if runs last more than 45 minutes or so) your runs, especially in the heat. If you feel at all thirsty, you are already dehydrated.

Running truly requires the least equipment and planning of all exercise. Starting a running program is far simpler than most people believe. If you're new to running or have any health impairments, it's advisable to make an appointment with your doctor to be sure you are healthy and ready to start. Then, grab your good pair of running shoes and a couple of running buddies then get off the couch and... go! You'll be looking and feeling better in no time.

Source: In Health and Fitness