



Runners – The importance of Strength & Flexibility.

Want to improve your running? Running to improve your running, is obviously necessary – but if you ONLY RUN to improve, your setting yourself up for a fall.

STRENGTH

In almost every sport these days, Strength Training is recommended and has emerged as a proven way to achieve 2 things: An **increase** in performance, and a **decrease** on injury occurrence.

Generalized body weight exercises will help with performance – those hitting big muscle group such as squats, lunges, planks etc...will help and of course can be performed easily without any equipment. To optimise muscles fibre recruitment and strength gains – focus on the speed of the movement during dynamic exercises. For example – a squat/lunge, aim to take 3 seconds descending and 2 to come back up. This will make you stronger, and absolutely will help you.

There are more specialised, targeted exercises that will be a great help too. The way in which these differ to those above is that they hit areas that are directly associated with the running action, and as such are of even greater benefit to the exercises above.

We do some of these in Thursday's Runners session. A great example is anything involving a knee drive. A back lunge with a knee drive in front, is a great one and that's why it's included so much. The hips are such a central, fundamental part of the running action, and if you are tight/weak in this area – it'll compromise you greatly, and the more you run, the more it'll affect you. Another example of such an exercise is a static bridge with heel raises. Such exercises feel a world away from running – and are much less exciting, but taking even 30 minutes of your week to do such exercises will keep you striding out on those trails and generally, performing well!

2 targeted strength sessions a week is what I generally advise for people that run regularly.

FLEXIBILITY

Another key part, but an often neglected element of running programmes. True, when muscles are stretched their ability to contract and work is compromised (one of the reasons that static pre stretches are generally discouraged before/at the start of a training session), but this is only a very short term problem – it's the Range of Motion Exercises/Stretches that over time, lengthen the muscles and that is really what we are after.

The result is more blood, oxygen and nutrients to the areas in question – improving both performance and repair. Repair doesn't just mean when injury occurs – each time the muscles are

challenged through exercise – there is a process of repair that goes on, often without you knowing about it – though if you are experiencing DOMS, you definitely know about it!!

Target the muscles that extend/flex the hips and knees in particular – Hip Flexors, Glutes, Hamstrings and Quads. Consistency is key – and whilst it does not take that long to increase your flexibility – you do have to stay on top of it. It's the component of fitness that you'll regress most quickly if you stop doing it.

Look to increase your range of movement through the joints and it'll only be a good thing. If we can lengthen muscles and strengthen them at the same, then you'll get the most from those muscles and get more from your running!

I recommend regular runners do a targeted stretch session 3-6 times a week.

As a summary – your hill reps/tempo runs/speed work/long runs are all great – but without finding time for the above, I am afraid your (physically, anyway) just not getting the most from your training.