

Cross- Training Guidelines

from GMC's Sports Medicine experts

Cross-Training Guidelines

Cross-training is defined as any sport or exercise that supplements your main sport. For runners, cross-training is usually any low-impact activity other than running that elevates heart rate levels for an extended period of time. If you're dealing with an injury, you may need to cross train more frequently. Talk to your doctor or physical therapist to get advice on how much you should cross train and what activities are best for your specific injury. While cross-training, maintain low intensity and short duration. Remember that the purpose of this activity is to promote recovery and not to push your limits.

Five Benefits of Cross-Training for Runners

Cross-training is any sport or exercise that supplements your main sport -- in this case, running. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced marathoner, you can benefit from cross-training. Here are several reasons why runners should cross-train:

- 1. It helps balance your muscle groups.** Cross-training helps strengthen your non-running muscles and rest your running muscles. You can focus on specific muscles, such as your inner thighs, that do not get worked as much while running and may be weaker than your running muscles.
- 2. You will maintain or even improve your cardiovascular fitness.** Many cross-training activities are great cardiovascular workouts.
- 3. It reduces your chance of injury.** By balancing your weaker muscles with your stronger ones, you'll help reduce your chance of injury. Participating in low-impact cross-training activities, such as swimming or water running, will also lessen the stress on your joints.
- 4. You will avoid getting bored with running.** Running day after day will eventually burn out even the most hard-core running enthusiast. Cross-training gives runners a much-needed mental break from their sport, which is especially important for those training for long-distance events such as marathons.
- 5. You can continue to train with certain injuries, while giving them proper time to heal.** Runners suffering from injuries are sometimes told by their doctors to take a break from running during their recovery or rehabilitation periods. But with certain injuries, it is possible to continue with cross-training. Cross-training can help injured runners maintain their fitness and deal better with the frustration of being sidelined from running. Cross-training may speed recovery, even faster than recovery times with sedentary behavior.

When Should I Cross-Train?

In general, recreational runners should supplement 3-4 days of running with 2-3 days of cross-training each week. Competitive runners who run 4-6 days a week can substitute a low-intensity, cross-training workout for an easy run or a rest day 1-2 days a week.

Cross-training is also great for runners who are traveling and may not be able to run outside or on a treadmill, but who have access to other types of activity. But let your body be your guide. The amount of cross-training you do really depends on how you are feeling, both mentally and physically.

Cross-training Exercise Examples:

Swimming: Swimming is an excellent cross-training activity for runners because it is not weight-bearing, so it gives your joints a break. Joints take a lot of stress with running. Swimming allows you to build strength and endurance, and also improves flexibility. It is a great balance for running because swimming works your upper body while giving leg muscles a break. Swimming is especially recommended for people who are prone to running injuries or are recovering from an injury. Some runners also find it very relaxing and meditative.

Water Running/Aquatics: Water running is a great alternative for injured runners or as a substitute for an easy running day. It's a smart way to get in your runs during hot and humid weather. While you can run in the water without flotation aids (vests, belts, etc.), you'll find the workout to be easier with them.

Cycling or Spinning: Cycling and spin classes are also great low-impact ways to boost your cardiovascular fitness and strength. Quads and glutes are especially strengthened by cycling or spinning.

Elliptical: Elliptical machines provide a total body cardiovascular workout. Their oval-shaped (ellipse) motion provides the user with the feel of cross-country skiing, stair climbing and walking all at the same time. You can program the elliptical machine to move in either a forward or backward motion, so you can work all the major muscles in your legs. Because the muscles used on the elliptical are similar to those you use when running, the machine is a good low-impact alternative when an injury prevents you from running.

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