

Pain-Free Running

Running on a regular basis has numerous health benefits. Studies show that running for just 5-10 minutes a day can benefit the heart, help prevent neurological diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, result in a lower chance of cancer, and of course, build excellent lung capacity, and function as a great leg and core workout. Additionally, a runner's high is very real. The endorphins and other chemicals you release in the brain while running are not dissimilar to those released from getting high on cannabis. Not to mention, when a runner's high wears off, you're left with the benefits, as opposed to the crash some feel after smoking too much weed. Running can help with depression and other mental health issues as well.

All that being said, running can be a pain, literally. Running is difficult. It's hard on your joints if you're not healthy enough. It can leave you feeling beyond sore and tired, and if you're wanting to run every day, you might be feeling like you don't have enough time to recover in between runs. I've put together a list of some of the most common problems new runners face, and the best way to fix them, based on my experiences.

I've found that pain from running is caused by four major things and can generally be fixed with one thing. Pain while running is often caused by poor form, poor shoes, poor diet, and obesity. If you were to fix your diet, all of your problems while running would get better and would eventually go away, but you might need a few other things to fix the problem completely in a timely fashion.

Hip Flexor Pain

Hip flexors are muscles that bring your legs up towards your torso while bending your torso towards the hip. In other

words, they flex the hips (hence the name). You can feel the hip flexors through the sides of your thighs up to the hips.

When I moved away from a slow jog and started trying to run as fast as I could, my hip flexors became extremely sore. If you notice your hip flexors are sore, the best thing you can do is stretch them. In my experience, if I notice the soreness in the hip flexors one day and then stretch, they're worse the next day.

Low lunges and the pigeon pose are my two favorite stretches that I do almost every day to combat sore hip flexors. They're also great for opening up the hips in general. Check out this article for some other good stretches for the hip flexors. I've also found that any post-runners yoga routine is great for stretching the hips. This is my favorite yoga routine for after a run.

Knee Pain

Knee pain and overall joint pain (more on that later) is often caused by inflammation and can be fixed by diet. But that can take a while. So, in the meantime, you can correct your running form a couple of different ways to alleviate knee pain. You should be running on your toes, not running on your heels. The impact of running on your heels often causes knee problems.

I also recommend running in Vibrams. Regular running shoes are not as good for your feet as they're made out to be. You can read more about that in this article. Regular running shoes make it difficult to run on your toes, and they weaken your foot muscles. Vibrams are made to mimic the natural way we walk when we're barefoot, and they build up your muscles in your feet.

Lower Back Pain

Lower back pain comes from poor kidney function and/or excess weight. I still experience lower back pain while running if I'm not taking practically perfect care of myself. Diet is key, and it will fix most problems. But to target the lower back, I drink a gallon of cranberry lemonade a day to keep my kidneys working properly.

I still have about 40 pounds of extra weight to lose. This is the other factor in lower back pain! Having extra weight puts stress on the kidneys and can also result in lower back pain, so, as much as it sucks to hear, losing weight will help with your lower back pain.

In the meantime, when you're on your feet, tighten your abs to relieve pressure on your lower back. I use this trick when I'm running, when I'm on my feet for prolonged periods of time, and whenever my lower back is bothering me. I also do ab exercises every day to strengthen my abs and relieve lower back pain. I find that yoga helps, too, but if I'm doing yoga solely to relieve lower back pain, then I've been slacking on the actual methods to prevent lower back pain. Ideally, I do these things on a regular basis to prevent lower back pain, not make lower back pain better (although it works for that too).

Foot Pain

People are often wearing the wrong kind of shoes for running. Tennis shoes are not good for your feet. The extra cushy arch support flattens your arches and can contribute to all sorts of problems. You're better off in the long run with Vibrams or other toe shoes.

I will warn you, toe shoes can take a bit of time to get used to when you first start running. As your feet muscles begin to

get stronger, your feet will probably be sore while you adjust. If you're running on gravel paths, look out for rocks! The soles of your toe shoes are thinner than regular tennis shoes.

You might find that if you're running every day with Vibrams, they wear out faster than tennis shoes. Make sure you are wearing the proper size shoe when you're running. If your shoes are too small, you won't have room to compensate for swelling. If your shoes are too large and your feet have too much room to move around, that is also a problem. When you buy running shoes, you want them to be slightly too big to compensate for swelling.

Overall Joint Pain

Joint pain and excessive soreness from running are often caused by inflammation and the body's inability to recover quickly. This can be fixed by diet. I wouldn't be able to run every day the way I do, at my current weight, if I didn't eat as well as I do! Check out this article to learn more about how to achieve homeostasis through diet. You are what you eat! Pay attention to what you put into your body so your body is able to perform at the level you want. Check out this article to learn more about joint pain, the causes, and how to fix it.

Side-aches

You'd be hard-pressed to find a runner who hasn't suffered from side stitches at one point in time. Remember to breathe deeply throughout your run (I know it's hard, but it will get easier as your lung capacity gets better). Don't run on a full stomach. I prefer to run first thing in the morning on an empty stomach.

Conclusion

Running on a regular basis and recovering enough to enjoy it every day, is certainly a challenge. That being said, it can be done, and running is one of the best forms of cardio. Running boosts my mood, gives me energy, and creates a routine in my daily life. I've found it to be my favorite way to start the day. In fact, it's a guarantee that my day is going to be better if I start it with a run.

Developing daily running habits isn't easy, but taking care of yourself so you have the physical ability to develop daily running habits, is a good place to start.

Running Without Knee Pain