Running and Balance

By: Bobby Maybee, DC

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In my practice I come across many runners and triathletes. They seek care because of specific injuries or because they find that the chiropractic adjustment helps them perform their sport with greater ease and mobility. What's amazing about these high level athletes is how many of them have poor stability standing on one leg, otherwise known as reflex stabilization. This lack of stability is an indicator of deeper issues in the runner's mobility and flexibility, suggesting compensations and substitutions that lead to injury or inefficiency.

This doesn't mean they are bad runners. Actually, the high level of athletic performance they possess often masks the dysfunctions and instabilities that are present. What poor stability means in a runner is that they are wasting energy. If they understood the concepts of mobility and stability, and then used them in training, they could be even better runners! Wasted energy is inefficient. Efficiency is what running is all about!

Unfortunately, when most runners attempt to improve their efficiency, they usually focus on technique, diet, and overall endurance, while failing to focus on something as basic as correcting dysfunctional movement patterns. A movement pattern is the most efficient and fluid way the body performs a movement. We all develop them as children, and evolve them as we crawl, stand, walk, and run.

Most runners, especially long-time runners and accomplished runners who perform well, automatically assume their movement mechanics are just fine. If there is no pain, and these folks are finishing their races and runs, why wouldn't they think so? If specific running technique looks good, why even consider basic stability and mobility? We consider it because of its effects on efficiency and overall long term effects on the musculoskeletal system (tightness and pain).

In the long run, nothing in excess is good. Not even running. The most ideal way to go about running would be to run enough to challenge your body, but not so much you start to damage it. Run enough to work on technique and strategy, and then also devote time to flexibility and strength training. But how do we know when our running is becoming too much?

The Functional Movement Screen (FMS) assists athletes in assessing key functional movement patterns, identifying weaknesses, imbalances, or compensations that can lead to future injury or impede performance. Seven body movements that are "a simple way to track the fine line between training, over training, and misdirected training." All athletes should maintain a balanced and acceptable FMS score. In fact, many NFL teams and professional athletes from all sports use the FMS system to stay ahead of the competition.

When a runner's strength or FMS score goes down, we know that the runner has been hyper focused on running, but has neglected the basic reflex and structural mechanisms that support running. Excessive running on a dysfunctional system can cause a lack in stability.

Muscle stiffening can develop because of an inefficiently operating core. Repeated activity like running reinforces this stiffness, a reinforcement stretching will not fix.

The challenge I see with runners is that many of them are stuck in the frame of mind that they cannot take off any time to work on other skill sets, like mobility or strength, because that would affect their endurance. This is simply just not true. But reduced efficiency and wasted energy is guaranteed when runners continue to train and reinforce poor movement patterns in high volume. The amount of gains in efficiency of just working a few weeks on mobility will far outweigh any loss in endurance. It's so hard to get runners, dedicated athletes or recreational runners, to realize that NOT running for brief periods can actually improve running speeds.

Think of training as a pyramid with three levels. The base of the pyramid is mobility. Mobility and solid movement patterns are the foundation of proper training. The second level of the pyramid is stability and strength. The peak of the pyramid is skill specific exercises. In this scenario, a runner should always first focus on proper mobility, then build strength and stability, and then (and only then) dedicate time to skill specific running drills.

Runners are encouraged to come in and get an FMS evaluation. It's quick and loaded with powerful information to assist you in getting more out of the activity you love so much.
You can read more about the FMS at www.functionalmovement.com.
Once you're ready to schedule, call Middle Path Medicine at 805-481-3442.

Your Journey to Health and Healing,
Bobby Maybee, DC

References:

Upon Request

Website: www.middlepathmedicine.com
E-mail: info@middlepathmedicine.com