Cross-Training Ideas Checklist

Now that you know the importance of cross-training, what are some good cross training activities to choose? The following list is certainly not comprehensive, but provides an overview of beneficial activities for the runner.

Think about adding 2-3 different exercises from the list below to your marathon training:

Cardiovascular Exercise

1) Swimming- good for the upper body and general conditioning. Can help with relaxation and recovery and provides an aerobic benefit without weight bearing.

2) Water jogging- perfect for avoiding hot weather and for the injured runner. Uses all muscle groups but is a non-impact activity.

3) Rowing- best for upper body and abdominals. Helps build strength in core muscles.

4) Cross country skiing- total body workout that is cardiovascular and non-impact.

5) Cycling/Spinning- focuses on lower body and increases cardiovascular fitness. Balances muscles in legs by working quadriceps and shins.

6) Elliptical trainer- mimics the running motion in a non-impact way. You should run backward 1/4 of the time to work the front of your leg.

7) Walking- uses running muscles with lower impact.

8) Stair climbing- aerobic exercise that works the quads and glutes.

9) Rope jumping- good total body workout that requires minimal equipment.

10) Skating (incline or ice)- works lower body and increases cardiovascular fitness.

11) Group sports- basketball, racquetball, baseball, tennis, and hockey. Group exercise sports are great to decrease boredom and get a cardiovascular workout.

12) Pylometrics- Speed, agility, and balance drills, circuit training, sprinting, and other forms of skill conditioning.

Strength Training

1) Weight training (uses a weight for resistance)- great for building strength. Can use free weights, machines, tubing, and resistance bands. Don't work the same muscle group back to back. Allow muscles to recover for 48 hours between weight training sessions.

2) Strength training (uses body weight for resistance)- strengthens unbalanced muscle groups. This can include calisthenics (push ups, crunches, and pull ups).

Flexibility

1) Yoga- involves strength training and builds flexibility, balance, and stretching.

2) Pilates- improvements in flexibility, posture and abdominal strength -- and decreases in back, neck, and joint pain are reported.

Rules for Effective Cross-Training

One of the biggest misconceptions among runners who want to train for a marathon or get faster is that they should run every day. When I trained for my first marathon this was certainly my mentality. I felt guilty if I didn't run every day, even if I felt injured or fatigued. I enjoyed the running experience and the endorphin high it produced. But, in reality, my body actually needed rest days to recover and repair muscles to get stronger. So, if you run every day without taking days off, you won't see much improvement and you may even seriously injure yourself.

Running puts stress on your joints and having cross-training and rest days will give your joints a chance to recover from all that pounding. It's also good to take a mental break from running, so you don't lose motivation by running every day. When I intersperse my running with cross-training days I always look forward physically and mentally to the days that I run.

Eight Rules for Effective Cross-Training

1) **Cross-training should not be a substitute** for a scheduled run unless you are injured. Simply not "feeling like" doing your 8 mile run isn't a good enough reason to skip running in favor of taking a walk.

 2) **Don't let your cross-training wear you out** and decrease the quality of your running. Watch for signs and symptoms of overtraining. These include increased resting HR, fatigue, frequent illness, heavy legs, and mental burnout. See the lesson in the running dynamics course on overtraining for more information.

3) **Have a plan** (don't just do it). Remember, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Use your training log to record which cross-training activities you do, how you feel, and any other pertinent data.

4) **Add cross-training gradually** if you are not accustomed to the activity. Like all things be sure to build up your level of endurance slowly. Just because you can run for an hour doesn't necessarily mean that you can do everything in a power yoga class right away.

5) **Use appropriate cross-training activities** that will benefit your running goals. While these may be great leisure activities, things like golf or bowling are not going to have a beneficial impact on your fitness level. Effective cross-training should have a similar duration and intensity to your running.

6) **Don't put more stress on injured areas.** If you are dealing with injury, make sure your cross-training activity will not make the problem worse. Listen to your body and stop if you feel discomfort in the injured area. Check with your health care provider before doing a cross-training activity.

7) **Know when to stop**. Remember, your primary goal is to successfully completing your marathon. It may not be wise to give it your all in that basketball game and risk injury and fatigue.

8) Enjoy the benefits of cross-training. Cross-training done right will greatly benefit your running and make you a stronger athlete.

Quick Reminder

If you are currently training for a race it is important to refrain from high-impact, jarring sports such as tennis, racquetball, basketball, soccer, volleyball, skiing, and aerobic dance as these may increase your risk of injury. I've heard from too many runners who were forced to push back their race because of an injury obtained while performing another sport. If you are dealing with an injury, only use cross-training as allowed by your medical provider.

For helpful tips and motivation, check out the Marathon Training Academy podcast found in the iTunes store. We wish you ultimate success in reaching your running goals!