



The Doc Is In

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Body Language

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But Uncle Walter Says...

Should you take running advice from non-runners?

FIVE REASONS WHY RUNNING IS SO BAD FOR YOU:

1. It will destroy your knees.
2. “ “ “ “ hips.
3. “ “ “ “ feet.
4. It will jiggle you internal organs until they droop.
5. It will squash the discs in your spine.

Wow, that sounds pretty grim. Better stop running and take up bingo: much safer and you won't get rained on, barked at and your socks will last longer. Most importantly, you won't be pulverizing your precious body parts by pounding them into the pavement. Much better to preserve your joints by parking them comfortably on the sofa and nourishing them with pork rinds, Ho-Ho's and reruns of *Laverne and Shirley*. Maybe every month of so dust off the Thigh-Master or play the Eight Minute Abs video and give yourself a real workout without the certain ruination of running.

Hold on – don't toss your new Nikes in the trash just yet. Why? Because those five reasons, though frequently spewed as good excuses for the lazy life, are absolutely, unequivocally...nonsense!

Walking and running are the two forms of locomotion which the human body is quite efficient at performing. We have evolved over countless millennia as pedestrians: survival in a primitive setting has often hinged on our ability to travel long distances over rough terrain on our own two feet. And running, sometimes as fast as possible, was certainly necessary for hunting and evading predators. Conversely, we are not designed, anatomically or biomechanically, to spend hours hunched over a bike, swimming in a pool, hanging by our finger tips off a cliff, or whacking a tennis ball across a net. Don't get me wrong – these are all wonderful activities, but they are not exactly “normal,” natural functions of human beings. Neither is sitting at a computer, as I'm doing right now. Running, on the other hand, is something we have been doing quite well for a long, long time.

So why the bad rap? There's no denying that runners get injured rather frequently – my office waiting room sometimes looks like an Empire Runners Club meeting. Running is associated with a relatively high rate of injuries (compared to walking, cycling, swimming, lawn bowling, shuffle board, etc.), it seems, due to three major factors:



1. Running has narrow tolerances for mechanical imbalances and distortions in our muscles, joints and connective tissues.
2. Running can be easily sabotaged by numerous external factors, including how we work, sit, drive and sleep, as well as what shoes we wear, the surfaces we run on, etc.
3. Avid, enthusiastic runners are notorious for over-training.

Hmm, interesting stuff, indeed. (Hey wake up!) Stay tuned next month where we'll talk about these risk factors for running injuries and how to avoid being part of the walking wounded.

December 2010 Addendum to part one:

Here we are, 10 years wiser (maybe just a little, perhaps?), and some folks still spout that same old nonsense that running will be the ruination of your body. That misconception does seem to be fading, finally, and there is a greater appreciation that running is actually a natural and healthful activity for us bipedal hominids. The scientific literature now overwhelmingly indicates that running does not lead to arthritic wear and tear of the knees, hips or spine, unless one is already predisposed for the condition (by a history of significant trauma to a joint, for instance) and/or the runner runs – how shall I put this gently? – like an idiot. This means running excessively, obsessively, when irritated or injured body parts are screaming for attention and TLC.

If there's a simple summary to our current views on healthful running, it's this: We come from a long lineage of tough, resilient long-distance walkers and runners and our bodies are uniquely developed for this form of locomotion. But various factors, including our modern lifestyle which includes a lot of sitting, can sabotage us and contribute to running-related injuries. So, in order to keep running happily for many decades, we need to embrace the notion that there's more to running than simply running. We need to develop and maintain a certain level of primitive athleticism and durability. More on this next month.