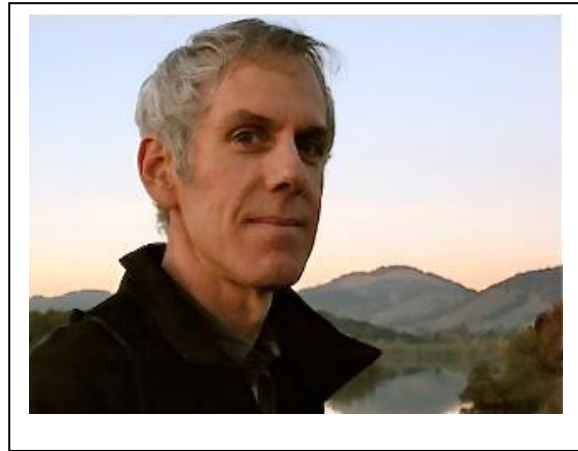




Return to Running

by Jonathan Hayden

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It was late in the year, cold, damp and grey. But I was in pretty good shape training for strength to get ready for the spring races. In January, business travel took me back east twice in the first few weeks of the month. Despite getting good rest, treadmill

runs, and a lot of vitamin C, upon my return it hit me. A nasty virus that squeezed my throat so tight I couldn't speak for a week. As it moved around my head and chest reeking havoc, (sore throat, stuffy head, sore chest) my running literally stopped. Once the hacking cough set in I was done. A slave to the couch or bed. Neither felt comfortable and sleep seemed like a distant childhood dream. 3 weeks later I emerged well enough to think about running again (although I rarely gave it a thought while I was ill). Still there were times I thought about not running again.

This feeling, having the energy drained out of you from illness, is what happens to just about everyone sooner or later. I had to decide if I wanted to get back into running or not. It wasn't an easy choice. All those miles and effort put into training and racing. I wasn't sure I wanted to start over again. But soon I remembered starting over again is not where you are after only 3 weeks of illness. It takes a lot longer than that to lose all that fitness. The human body is amazing in how quickly it can rebound from illness and injury. It's the mind that takes the longest to recover from my point of view. And in my case this was the challenge. I just wasn't committed.

So, I decided to take it one step at a time. Start out slow, just test the waters. My first run was on a warm afternoon in my favorite park, Spring Lake. Just a simple run with an easy pace. I felt pretty good, but sluggish and a little weak. Seeing other runners and walkers in the park was inspiring as are the natural views of the lake and surrounding hills. I admit I scripted this event on purpose to get my mind back into running. Who wouldn't love that kind of run?

The next day I knew I would be stiff and sore. It was no surprise but a bit disappointing to be that sore. Tylenol kept me from feeling it too much and I decided to wait until the soreness wore off enough to go for another run. When the time came to go again, I still felt a little stiff and a bit sore, until I warmed up. Another easy run just to get back into the rhythm.

After a few weeks of light running, I was able actually to "train". The results were not surprising. My legs felt slower and with less strength. But it's a beginning. Every day back is another step to getting fitter and back on track to reach my goals for the year. So, at least for now I am committed to working

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back into shape. Sometimes I think it's just about having faith in the process and trusting your body to respond in it's own time and with lots of rest.

After a month, I'll have a better idea what kind of shape I'm getting into and when I can begin to plan to race. What started as a decision to begin again after an illness, has become a commitment to a goal. I often think of the saying, "a journey of a 1000 miles, begins with the first step". When running feels pointless and workouts seem more labor than fun, I tell myself to be patient and keep moving. My return to running after an illness has become a journey of faith in the process and commitment to the goals. The value for me is more about the process than the outcome. As the joy of running returns, along with my fitness, I am sure the illness and the effort made to start again will become just a distant memory. For now, it's time to go out for a trail run...the sun is warm and beginning to set. Another great winter day for a run. Maybe I'll see you out there.