



"S" IS FOR STRENGTH!

Whether you are preparing for a marathon, 5K or simply running for fitness, you can benefit from strength training. A basic strength plan has value for everyone, and those of us who are over 40 have probably heard about the importance of strength training in helping to maintain muscle mass. While bootcamp, P90X and CrossFit WODs are all great for developing strength and power, they are not run specific. Run specific strength training works to enhance the ability of the muscles to perform as they do while running. It is the most effective type of strength training for improving your running experience.

For most runners the biggest benefit of strength training is a reduction in running injuries. With stronger muscles, connective tissues, joints and more resilience to fatigue, you decrease the likelihood of injury. Running is a sport of repetitive stress and pavement pounding. There are many well-documented studies showing that strength trainings tremendously beneficial for running in multiple ways that decrease injury risk and improve performance. Most coaches don't even consider strength training to be a cross-training activity- it's just part of the comprehensive training that runners need to do!

INJURY PREVENTION:

Depending on which study you look at, anywhere from 35% to 80% of runners are injured in a given year. Experts agree that a proven way to prevent injuries is to strength train. Runners are prone to weaknesses in the hip and glute muscles. Any kinetic chain weaknesses can compromise form, potentially leading to changes in gait that increase your chance of injury. Common running aches and pains are often associated with tendinitis, runners knee and IT band syndrome; all of these can be related back to hip strength. The pieces that make up the hip joint area are involved with propelling, stabilizing and keeping our lower body in line as we run. Women's hips are generally wider than men's, which makes them even more susceptible to injury due to the fact that they have a greater Q angle (a measure of the quad muscle relative to the knee cap). One of the biggest areas that this effects is related to knee stability. Strong muscles also absorb more of the impact that occurs when you strike the ground, meaning less of it is handled by the bones, joints and ligaments.

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE:

Strength training plays an important role in improving the components of running performance. Anaerobic power, neuromuscular coordination, running economy and muscle endurance are some of the key areas that can be optimized with a little strength work.

Anaerobic Power: Energy that is stored in muscles that can be accessed without the use of oxygen.

Neuromuscular Coordination: Also known as "motor control" or "muscle memory", it is the communication that occurs between the brain and the muscles to perform a specific task.

Running Economy: The efficiency at which oxygen is used while running a certain pace.

Clearly, improving in even one of these areas could lead to improvement in performance. Considering that strength training impacts ALL of these areas, it's surprising that 100% of runners aren't doing it!

You don't need weights to start an effective strength program. A great place to begin is with bodyweight exercises. For those who are more experienced with strength training, or who want an extra performance boost, a workout with more substantial weightlifting is an option.

Here are a few of my favorite basic moves that benefit runners of all abilities:

Single-leg deadlift: Stand with legs hip width apart. Shift your weight to one foot and slowly hinge at the waist, picking your other leg up. Keep the leg you are picking up straight and lift until it is parallel with the ground, making sure to keep your hips parallel to the ground as well. Slowly lower back to the ground to starting point. Repeat 10-15 times and then switch legs.

Lateral (side) lunge: Start with legs hip width apart. Take a large step to the left with your left leg, bending your left knee but keeping your right leg straight. Return to center. Repeat on opposite side. Start with 10 lunges on each side, increase to 20 as you get stronger.

Bridges: Start by lying on the floor with both knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Slowly lift your hips toward the ceiling and into a bridge position. Shoulder blades should be planted flat on the floor. Once at the top, hold for a count of 5 and the slowly lower back to the floor. Repeat 15-20 times.

Clamshells: Lie on the floor on your side with knees bent and legs stacked. Keep legs in alignment with core. Slowly lift your top knee while keeping feet attached. Repeat 15-20 times and then switch sides.



Plank: Start on all fours. Lower to your forearms with shoulders directly over elbows. Step feet back into plank position. Draw shoulders down and back. Keep hips in line with shoulders so your body forms a long, straight line. Squeeze legs and glutes for support. Start with holding for 30 seconds; increase to 60 seconds as you get stronger.

Concentrate on slow, deliberate movements with each movement, focusing on form. Beginners can start with one set and those with more experience should aim for 2-3 sets.

I'm super excited to be offering some Run Specific Strength classes at Gaukler Family Wellness this spring. Watch the website and Facebook page for dates and times. This will be a great way to learn some specific moves to add to your running routine.

Happy Running!!

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