

The Ten Most Common Running Mistakes

by Mark Lorenzoni

Having been involved in the sport for over 25 years, I've gradually accumulated a list of avoidable mistakes—many of which can lead to injury and lengthy layoffs. These mistakes are almost all self-inflicted, so watch yourself.

1. Increasing your mileage too quickly. Any weekly increase of more than 10 to 15 percent is asking for trouble. Listening to your body is always a good guide because your head will almost always tell you that more sooner is better—and it just ain't so.
2. Increasing your intensity too quickly. Novices who join training groups of experienced runners frequently fall into this category. Pushing yourself is the only way to improve, but it's also a great way to injure yourself if you fail to balance hard workouts with easy days.
3. Running your daily workout at faster than a conversational pace. If you've so far resisted the temptation to strap yourself into a heart rate monitor, don't despair. Your ability to conduct a conversation while you run is a good indicator that you are giving yourself a decent aerobic workout. Remember, your conversational pace can vary from day to day.
4. Pounding down hills. Register now for arthroscopy. Pounding down hills is a great way to injure your knees. Use your downhills to recover from the effort you put into getting up there in the first place. Concentrate on form, rather than raw speed.
5. Starting off too fast. In a perfect world, we would all stretch and warm up thoroughly before going out for a run. In the world most of us live in, we warm up gradually during the first mile. So don't push it. Use the first mile to warm up. The same strategy holds true for the last mile, which you can use as a warm down. Even if you do stretch, this is a sound tactic.
6. Try to squeeze every last little bit of wear out of your shoes. The great thing about running is doesn't take much equipment. All you need is a solid pair of shoes. Most people can expect to get 400 miles from a pair. You're better off keeping a running log than using the wear patterns as a guide. Most shoes have lost their protective ability long before they look dead.
7. Running on concrete when you can avoid it. Concrete is about the hardest, most unforgiving surface around. Blacktop absorbs 20 times more shock than concrete does. If you can safely run against traffic in the road on blacktop, rather than on a concrete sidewalk, do it.
8. Failing to rest after an event. Most people know about tapering before a race, but few runners allow their bodies to recover adequately after running all out. The longer the race, the longer the recovery time you'll need.
9. Failing to warm up properly before racing or cooling down afterwards. Warming up will not only help forestall injury but it can increase your time. Cooling down will help your body flush out the lactic acid that has accumulated and speed your recovery.
10. Failing to listen to your body. All too many runners treat their bodies as if they were balky children, rather than their one and only ally. If you don't respect your body—and your limitations—you're asking for long-term layoffs.