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5 Reasons Why Running too Much May be Bad For You Featured

Written by [Michelle Leach](#) | font size | [Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

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The benefits of running are well publicized; aside from its stress- and depression-busting qualities (“runner’s high,” anyone?), the sport is also linked to improved immune function and reduced risk of diseases like diabetes and breast cancer. [Stanford University](#) even found that, after tracking 500 seniors for two decades, the running group on average suffered disabilities 16 years later than their non-running counterparts. But for every study that suggests the more running you do, the better, there seems to be another contending that more running is not healthy. Some people, due to a variety of factors from family history to poor biomechanics, may have a lower threshold for running — their knees may start to ache at 5 miles versus 15, for example. But genetics and poor form are only part of the equation, as several studies in recent years suggest that with running, you really can get too much of a good thing.

5. Hard-Core Runners May Suffer in Long-Term Health



Studies suggest the benefits of running plateau after 20 to 30 miles per week; Maridav/Shutterstock.com

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We used to put marathon runners on a pedestal. Now we celebrate the athletes logging multiple 100-milers each year. It's human nature to push conceived boundaries. But we must identify and draw a critical line between "moderate" and "excessive" exercise. At its most innocuous, studies argue that after 20 to 30 miles of running a week, the blood pressure, cholesterol and other cardiovascular benefits of running plateau. More troubling, a study of both serial marathoners and a sedentary control group in the [European Heart Journal](#) found that the runners actually had a greater risk of heart disease than the couch potatoes, due to the buildup of coronary plaque.

The National Runners' Health Study, which has studied the health of tens of thousands of runners over several decades, has found that runners on whole are healthier than the general population; the study found that moderate running and walking reduced the risk of heart disease-related death in the almost 2,400 heart attack survivors it followed for 10 years. But researchers also discovered these heart attack survivors' odds of dying actually increased if they ran an average of about 5 miles (or walked around 7 miles) each day. Runners generally still outlive non-runners, but the "sweet spot" appears to be logging no more than 20 miles per week — spread across several days — at a modest pace of around 6 miles per hour. Researchers speculate your body, when under the constant stress of running hard for long intervals with no rest, becomes chronically inflamed. This inflammation predisposes you to heart disease and a whole host of other problems running is designed to prevent, not exacerbate.

4. Too Much Running is Bad For Some People's Joints



Some people are more susceptible to joint problems; Marcel Mooij/Shutterstock.com

Perhaps one of the biggest running myths goes something like, "Running is bad on my joints," usually related to the dreaded "runner's knee." Instead of blaming running, blame your parents. Joint problems are largely genetic, or they're caused by traumatic injuries. If you already have problems with arthritis, running can worsen those conditions. Aside from genetics, running can be the death knell for your joints if you have a heavier frame. When we walk, we place a force roughly three times our body weight on our knees; running puts a force up to 10 times our weight on our knees.

Even if you're a small person, running may be tough on your joints because of how you carry yourself. Some people naturally strike the ground with greater force than others. Others may naturally run with the inside part of their feet turned inward more than they should be (technical term: overpronation). These runners' bodies aren't designed to absorb shock well. And, while some shoes or inserts can help to promote better technique, the wrong footwear can make these existing weaknesses worse. As we age, too, cartilage wears down. So even those born to be robust shock absorbers may lose that quality with age, as there is no buffer between the bones when the cartilage wears down. The friction from the bones rubbing up against each other can contribute to the development of arthritis or make the disease worse. Still, we'll conclude with an oft-cited Stanford

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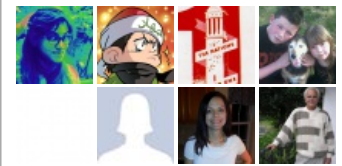
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University study published in 2008 that found even runners who logged extreme mileage totals were no more susceptible to knee problems than nonrunners.

3. Too Much Running May be Bad For Your Heart



Some studies suggest marathoners are more susceptible to cardiac issues; Jon Roig

Micah True earned acclaim after being featured in Christopher McDougall's heralded 2011 book, *Born to Run*. So when it was discovered that the 58-year-old likely died from a heart attack while on an easy 12-mile wilderness run in 2012, it didn't compute. True ran ultras. He embodied good health. But his heart told another tale; an autopsy revealed he had an enlarged left ventricle. It's believed this abnormality contributed to the vaunted athlete's death.

Cardiologist James O'Keefe — himself a former elite triathlete — attributed True's condition to Phidippides cardiomyopathy. Named after the Greek messenger who collapsed from exhaustion after supposedly running more than 150 miles between Marathon and Athens to announce the defeat of the Persians in battle, this condition is aptly associated with "chronic excessive endurance exercise." O'Keefe's [research](#) concluded that its male marathon running subjects were three times more likely to have developed scar tissue in the heart muscle linked to heart attacks than control subjects of the same age who didn't regularly run. Other surveys, too, have found evidence of such scarring in marathon runners; however, the results have been much more slight. But O'Keefe claims that even slight changes add up over time to become big problems, as the demands placed on the heart actually speed up the aging process — as opposed to slowing its progression as some researchers have asserted. Showing that there is no consensus on this issue, other researchers bitterly contested O'Keefe's claims.

The issue of "time" creeps up again and again, with many researchers noting that daily runs of more than one hour are to blame. Genetics again rears its head. If you, like the late elite marathoner Ryan Shay, have a history of heart problems or if any family members have such a history, consult with your doctor before embarking on a distance program.

2. If You're Running to Lose Weight, Slow Down and Take a Brisk Walk

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Some fitness experts suggest brisk walking may be better than running for weight loss; Tyler Olson/Shutterstock.com

You don't have to necessarily kill yourself with speedwork on the track or grueling treadmill sessions at a blistering pace to budge the pudge. In fact, many fitness professionals advocate exercising at a lower intensity to specifically target fat. Take out your smartwatch or heart monitor and run consistently in Zone 2 (60 to 69 percent of your maximum heart rate). This zone is characterized as a fat-burner because fat itself is slow to burn. With a longer and less intense workout (there we go again — intensity is key!), your body burns a higher amount of fat cells than it would at a higher zone for a shorter duration.

There is a caveat associated with this; Runner's World notes that if your metabolism is sluggish, running at higher intensities revs up how efficiently your body uses the energy it gets from food. Why? Because in general, running faster burns calories more quickly, so while fat calories specifically are burned at a lower percentage in a higher zone, the amount of fat burned increases as calorie usage outpaces calorie intake. It's suggested that higher-intensity runs be integrated into workouts with recovery periods to follow or that you limit the number of grueling workouts in a given week or month.

1. Running Too Much Can Create Several Health Issues



Overtraining can lead to insomnia, loss of appetite and other ailments; Ed Yourdon

Our brains crave a feel-good chemical known as serotonin, and running leads to a surge of this neurotransmitter. This is why

running has been linked to enhanced mood, improved sleep, reduced anxiety and depression, and a whole host of other mental and emotional plusses. But all these benefits may be cancelled out when you try to do too much. “Overtraining syndrome” is a very real problem. Do you remember snapping at the smallest things during two-a-days in high school or perhaps more recently when you stepped up your mileage while balancing work and family responsibilities? Emotional changes, including irritability, are hallmarks of the earliest stages of overtraining, as are depressed mood, sleep disruption and lowered sex drive. You may be so wrapped up in running that your appetite is suppressed, which can make you even more weak and exhausted and cause women to have irregular or missed periods. If you catch overtraining early on you can adjust either your training or your general “life” schedule to make time for yourself outside of exhausting runs — and that includes time to sleep. Other symptoms that can arise from overtraining include stress fractures and strained muscles and ligaments.

One More: Are Marathoners More Prone to Skin Cancer?

Vitamin D from the sun is known to be a great stress-buster. Combine sunlight with running’s feel-good traits and you have a powerful cocktail. But in a study reported by [SkinCancer.org](#), researchers found that marathoners are more likely than non-runners to have atypical moles or skin abnormalities that are risk factors for melanoma. Little more than half of those studied used sunscreen. While it seems obvious, runners need to apply sunscreen with an SPF of 15 to 30, wear eye protection and avoid running outside between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun is strongest. Researchers believe these athletes may have an increased risk of melanoma not just because of their time spent outdoors, but because their immune systems take a big hit during intense physical exercise.

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Michelle Leach's love of writing has taken her to Sydney, Australia, London, U.K. and other exotic locations like Grand Island, Neb., and Clio, Mich. She has developed pieces for TV and radio stations, PR departments, newspapers and magazines. A graduate of Northwestern University and Lake Forest College (also in Illinois) she enjoys running marathons and likes to say when not writing, she’s running—but she tries not to mix the two activities.

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