

# Just So You Know

## CROSS TRAINING: An Approach to Benefiting Your Running Health, Fitness and Performance

By Diane Wood

**NOTHING** beats running.....**NOTHING!** At least this is the opinion of most runners I know, including myself. I LOVED the sport of running when I first discovered its soothing effects. I ran five to six days a week, waking up at 4:00am to hit the pavement before work, running down the road in the dark with a smile on my face. People must have hated me as they drove by... tired, on their way into work! It wasn't until I suffered from my first running injury that I started to cross train. Little did I know something good would come from something so bad.

Most often, when a person finds a sport or activity they like, they spend time training for that sport day in and day out, as one should. **So why do anything else?** Sometimes doing the same exercise exclusively can be *too much* of a good thing and become counterproductive in achieving our goals. When we cross train, we get a more complete fitness program, making us a better athlete. It helps develop total body strength and develop muscle groups that may not be worked in one's primary sport of choice. Cross training creates a balance within our muscle groups and gives us stability and flexibility that can enhance our overall performance and training.



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Here are some of the reasons I consider cross training the *next best thing to running*:

### GUARDS AGAINST INJURY

Sport-specific training is a must to improve your performance, but consistent training can lead to overuse injuries, usually the result of a muscular imbalance and/or inadequate recovery. Cross training helps strengthen your non-running muscles and rests your running muscles, reducing injury potential. This enables you to train more consistently, making you better prepared for a race so you can perform at your best. Cross training is particularly beneficial for those who are more prone to injury.



#### Does and Don'ts

- **Don't** do activities that require quick, sudden movements.
- **Do** allow at least one day a week as a complete rest day.
- **Do** check morning heart rate regularly to avoid overtraining.

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**TIP:** Cross training is not intended to replace running. In order to become a better runner, you need to run. This is the concept of sports specificity. Combine it with running to maximize running fitness with lower actual mileage.

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### REHABILITATION



When injury does occur, you may need to cut way back on running -- or eliminate it entirely -- until you recover. Studies have shown that after 10 days of complete rest, declines in fitness begin to occur. However, by cross training you can reverse this process and possibly even come back stronger. According to Jim Bledsoe, PhD in an issue of Running Research News, "A typical athlete can reduce either the frequency or volume of training by up to 67% for 10 to 15 weeks without losing any fitness at all, as long as remaining workouts are fairly high quality." He also states that this break or reduction from running gives your body the opportunity to recover and rebuild, so it can return to an equivalent or higher level of cardiorespiratory strength. In addition, by working other muscles you offset any imbalances that may have been the cause of injury. Both are reasons cross training can contribute to better performance once you return to running.

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**TIP:** To maintain optimal fitness, select an alternate activity (one that does not strain the injury) that replicates running the most, such as water running, elliptical, or bicycling. Perform this activity for as long as your usual running session and at the same intensity.

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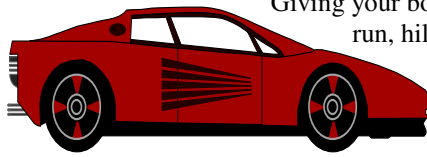
#### Injury Prevention

- ✓ Wear quality shoes
- ✓ **Increase mileage gradually**
- ✓ **Add new training elements gradually**
- ✓ Don't overdo challenging runs
- ✓ **Rest after challenging runs**
- ✓ Warm up/cool down with every run
- ✓ Stretch after running
- ✓ Choose good running surfaces
- ✓ **Pay attention to pain**

## GREATER RUNNING FITNESS

Cross training is a good option for athletes who want to augment their running performance without risking overuse. Here's why:

### Greater Average Workout Intensity



Giving your body time to recuperate from the intense effort of a long run, hilly run, or speed training is essential to preventing injury.

By cross training you can increase your average intensity per week without all the wear and tear running promotes, yet reap all the benefits. According to Owen Anderson, Ph.D., editor and founder of Running

Research News and author of Lactate Liff, "The upswing in intensity can do two great things: it can make the heart a bigger, stronger pump, and it can hoist blood volume." In other words, it increases how efficient blood is pumped to your muscles (the fuel and oxygen) during exercise which can improve running capacity. He also states that high intensity workouts increase your muscles resistance to fatigue because of improved tolerance of high work rates. Both of these combined enhance your over all conditioning with a reduced risk of injury.

**TIP:** Be careful with this form of training. It is also taxing on the body and is not for everyone. The body adapts to training stimuli, so if you have never done it before, start off slowly and work your way up. It is a great way to train if you are injured and don't want to lose your fitness. Don't overdo it by skipping rest days, which could lead to overtraining.

### Greater Strength & Flexibility



#### Types of Cross Training

- Swimming
- Water Running
- Cycling or Spinning
- Elliptical
- Rowing
- Yoga
- Cross-country Skiing

Which you choose depends on your goals and situation. See Figure 1 for more information regarding these activities on following page.

The greater strength gained in running specific muscle groups, as well as opposing muscles through cross training, can save energy and improve running economy. The increase in muscle strength decreases the number of muscle cells needed when running at your usual race intensity, saving energy and making you more economical. In addition, activities that require a wide range of joint movement or a specific stretching program – yoga, pilates – can enhance flexibility. This decreases the possibility of aches, pains and inflammations associated with joints stressed through rigorous activity.

#### Promotes Recovery

After running hard, your muscles need to do some minor repair work and refuel before they'll be ready to produce another strong effort. Light, easy workouts can accelerate recovery by increasing blood flow to the muscles, which enhances repair by removing metabolic waste products. In addition, they help keep you loose and more flexible, thereby decreasing chance of injury due to tight, sore muscles. "The use of cross training for active recovery can enhance your recovery between key workouts, so you perform better in your key workouts, get a more powerful training effect from them, and again achieve a higher level of fitness by race day," according to Matt Fitzgerald, a journalist and author specializing in the topics of health, fitness, nutrition and endurance sports training.



#### What's the buzz on high intensity exercise?

**HIGH INTENSITY exercise (HI) is a tool to improve endurance and aerobic capacity.** It is the "painful stuff" endured to increase performance. **HI is done at a level that feels challenging and leaves you too breathless to talk.** It can be taxing on the body therefore it requires a certain amount of conditioning. It is typically done in intervals in which you alternate a hard segment with a recovery segment. **For runners, this is equivalent to speed workouts typically done on a track. It should be noted though, that long runs and hill runs also place a lot of strain on the body although they are performed at a lower intensity and over longer period of time.**



#### What's all the muscle about?

When exercise is performed, impairment occurs. **We cause damage to the connective tissue and muscle fibers and drain energy reserves.** This damage occurs so stimulation and improvement can take place. **Recovery (when the body repairs, overcompensates, and improves as a result of exercise) results in strength gains.** Exercise merely provides the signal; the body produces the results. **It is in the interval between training sessions that most adaptations for increased muscle strength and endurance occur.**

My proneness for injury is what led me to cross training, but today, my love for running is the very thing that motivates me to continue cross training. I have seen the results and benefits it has made in my short running career. So it is for this reason I wanted to share with you, shall we say, the secret of my success. The activities I embark in the most are cycling, swimming, strength training, and elliptical. For more cross training activities and how they complement running, see the next page (bonus page...what can I say...I had extra time on my hands this month!)

If you have any questions or topics you would like to find out more about, please contact me at: [dwood5555@gmail.com](mailto:dwood5555@gmail.com). Stay tuned for the next bimonthly *Just So You Know* article.

Last time I checked, I have a degree in Business. I am just an avid runner who loves to read. Most of my material comes from online resources, books, and of course, my own experiences. Enjoy!

## Bonus Page

**Figure 1.** Muscle groups worked during various cross training activities



### **BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH VARIOUS CROSS TRAINING ACTIVITIES**

**Swimming** focuses on the upper body and general conditioning. It can help you relax and recover after long or hard workouts. Swimming provides an aerobic workout without being a weight-bearing exercise, thus making it a great option for marathoners and injured/recovering runners.

**Strength or weight training** can focus on keeping your legs strong during an injury or on strengthening unbalanced muscle groups (either upper body or the front of the leg, wherever you need).

**Yoga** can be used in much the same way as strength training, since some poses use your body weight as resistance to strengthen your muscles. It is also useful for stretching and conditioning all your "running" muscles. It can also be a nice way to relax from a long run or a hard day at work.

**Cross-country skiing** is another great complete body workout. It incorporates upper body, lower body, and core strengthening with an aerobic workout, and, if done in the snow instead of the gym, it can be a great way to connect with nature and prevent boredom. It can also be an alternative to running in the snow if you live in or are visiting a snowing climate.

**Water jogging** is a wonderful alternative for hot weather or injured runners. If done correctly, it requires the use of all your running muscles. However, since you are in the water, it is no-impact and cool.

**Biking and spinning** do focus on the lower body, but not necessarily on the "running" muscles. Whether cycling, spinning, or mountain biking is your favorite, adding biking into your routine can add interest, maintain (or gain) cardiovascular fitness, and balance out the muscles in your leg by working the quadricep and shin muscles.

**Elliptical machines** work similar muscles to those used when running. This is a good low-impact alternative, especially for those who are injured. You should spend at least 1/4 of the time you workout going backwards (running backwards) to work the front of the leg. This is great for interval training as well.

**Rowing** also focuses on the upper body, as well as the abdomen.