T R A I N I N G

Six Common Training Errors to Avoid

By Brad Beer

As a physiotherapist, I have observed that training errors play a major part in overuse running injuries. I regularly treat injured runners who, when their pre-injury training history is chronicled, have had a recent sudden increase in training volume, frequency and/or intensity. Alternatively, their training hasn't changed but they have neglected to schedule rest sessions.

Inadequate rest during your marathon training can lead to the seven most common running injuries – runner's knee, plantar fasciitis, ITB friction syndrome, shin splints, hamstring injuries, achilles tendon injuries and calf injuries.

Here are six common training errors to avoid while training for the Gold Coast Marathon:

1. 'Spiking' the training load

I regularly observe injured runners who, when their pre-injury training history is chronicled, have had a recent sudden increase in running training volume, frequency and/or intensity. I term this sudden increase in training load 'spikes' in training load. Sudden training spikes are to be avoided when possible.

A personal example of how a sudden training spike in recent years negatively affected my running was when I developed a stress reaction (precursor to stress fracture) of my femoral shaft (thigh bone) in 2015. This resulted in a feeling like I had 'torn my quadriceps muscle'. I knew I hadn't incurred a soft tissue strain (as there was no moment of 'tearing'). It was the week leading into a half marathon so I tapered and ran very little that week. Post-race imaging (MRI) confirmed my suspicion that I had developed a bone stress injury of my femur – a femoral shaft stress reaction. I had seen this injury professionally as a physiotherapist on rare occasions over my years of treating injured runners. My injury put me out of the 2015 Gold Coast Marathon.

On later analysis of why I developed this injury I realised that I had inadvertently 'spiked' my training load by running with some running friends on a series of Friday mornings at pace for 1 hour 15 minutes through hilly single trails. This had replaced my normal Friday morning 10km easy recovery run and, at that point in a fairly well established training pattern, it represented a 'spike' in load. Turns out my right femur (main braking leg for downhill corners and turns on the technical trails) didn't appreciate this spike. Nor did I, when I missed my only marathon in 2015 due to the injury! It was frustrating as when it came to the 5 steps I outline in my book 'You CAN Run Pain Free!' I had successfully implemented steps 1-4, but failed on step 5 'The Power of Rest'. Despite the irony of having to withdraw from my year's only marathon due to injury, after my book had hit Amazon Bestseller status, my key learning was that the 5 steps in the book really do work, however a runner needs them 'all working at once'.

2. Failing to schedule a rest day or rest session

The temptation to do more while training for a marathon is often intoxicating for runners. Many runners are in essence 'addicted' to the positive feelings that running produces. Runners can experience withdrawal signs from not running due to not experiencing their routine hit of 'endorphins' and other happy hormones (such as serotonin) that they would usually experience in full and uninterrupted training. Endorphins are substances that the body's central nervous system and pituitary gland produce. The term endorphin literally means 'morphine like substance'. Endorphins' role is to block pain that the body experiences and this includes pain when running. When a runner trains they routinely experience positive happy hormone effects, and their 'pain' can be blocked by endorphins. It can be addictive! Not running for even a single day can, therefore, be a challenge for many runners.

3. Doing too much too soon

This can be a pitfall of the over-zealous beginner runner who just wants to run 'more and more' while training for a marathon. It can likewise be the pitfall of the eager runner returning from an enforced break due to injury. For example, a beginner runner that builds up the duration (and distance) of their training sessions too quickly. Alternately, an experienced runner may increase the overall weekly volume of their training too quickly, from one week to the next in preparation for a major event. This can often happen when a runner has missed training leading into an event due to illness or injury. When the runner returns to training they can feel compelled to 'cram' the training load that they missed. In essence this cramming equates to the runner 'doing too much too soon'.

4. Going too hard on consecutive training sessions

Not every training session needs to be an intense workout. Runners must learn to discipline themselves in varying the pace and intensity across different training sessions. Many times the excitement of training takes hold and common sense and patience are erroneously forgotten. The result is that every single training session ends up being 'hard and intense'. This can be a trap runners fall into when they train in a group or with others. Unfortunately, when training with groups, the temptation is ever present to begin racing with your training partners. Proceed with caution! Hold each other to account on not racing and sticking to the aim of the session.

5. Replacing what should be a rest session with a training session

This often occurs when a runner is feeling 'fit' and highly motivated. I'm personally a sucker for this one. If I have had a good race or run at a Sunday event, rather than rest on the Monday morning I can be tempted to get up and run a moderate length run (often at too fast of a pace) still 'high' on the endorphins of the good race from the day before.