

WEIGHT TRAINING FOR RUNNERS

Many great runners, such as Paula Radcliffe, lift weights to increase strength and reduce injury. Sprinters traditionally use weight training to build power and strength, but research shows impressive results for distance runners also using weights as a technique to improve running strength and speed.

It is imperative with weight training to progressively develop your strength. Recovery between lifting sets or weights is important, with 3 to 6 minutes being an optimal rest period. Not only working on legs and core can produce results; muscular arms and shoulders help maintain speed throughout a run. The arm swing helps propel the body forward and a strong upper body will bolster your form when fatigue sets in.

Weight Training Benefits for Runners

Injury Prevention – For a beginner runner, gaining strength can be as important as running itself. It gives muscle tone and balance to the body, in order to support the demands of running. For more advanced runners, incorporating a weights program into your schedule can make all the difference in reaching a personal best or target time.

Correction of muscular imbalances – You can use weight training to build overall strength and to target muscles that habitually don't fire up when you run. You can work on bio-mechanical deficiencies, such as the ratio of strength between the quadriceps and the hamstrings.

Improvement in core stability – Stronger glutes, abdominals and stable hips. What more do you need?

Increase in basic speed – As an athlete, as you develop stronger and more fast-twitch muscles you will become more powerful and agile. As you improve the power you exert during each step, you will run faster. The more powerful your push-off the less effort you exert with each stride. You will find your stride length increases and it feels easier to run fast. The good news is that weight training yields the greatest improvements for average runners rather than elite runners!

Some Common Weight Training Concerns

Does it reduce endurance performance? Even though weight training is working on your anaerobic energy system, it has been proven not to reduce endurance performance.

Will I become tight and less flexible? Even full time weight lifters possess average to above flexibility. Continue your simple stretching routine for running, or practice yoga to aid flexibility.

Will I become big and bulky? You can make your muscles more powerful without significantly increasing their size. The rest period between repetitions and sets is important here. A longer recovery produces an increase in power to the muscles, while a short recovery promotes a greater hormonal response, and will build muscle size. As an aside for those of us gaining in age (as well as beauty!), research indicates that you naturally lose muscle mass after the age of 40. Strength training helps in preserving muscle and strengthening bones.

Good luck with your weights programme! Form and technique are important, so seek the help of a trainer at your gym or club if you are unsure how to lift. A trainer can also give you a programme specific to your needs.