

Yoga Principles Every Runner Should Know

by Diet Detective Editorial Staff

If until now your only mantra has been “keep moving!” maybe it’s time to change your approach. Here, four yoga fundamentals to apply to your running.

You strive for speed, stamina, power. You're a runner, and you do it all: You run hard, you run long, you strength train. Lately, though, you're feeling sore after long runs, and you're not able get into the "zone" anymore.

So what's a runner to do? Yoga, perhaps. If until now, your only mantra has been, "keep moving!" maybe it's time to change your approach. "The things I had to learn to succeed as a world-class runner are the things they teach in yoga," says Thom Birch, a former elite runner and instructor of Ashtanga yoga. Here Birch and other running and yoga experts explain four fundamentals of yoga that you can apply to your running.

Breathing

Although breathing might seem elementary, believe it or not, this is an area that most runners need to work on, says Mindy Solkin, USA Track & Field Level II certified running coach and owner of The Running Center in New York City. "Proper breathing is critical for runners, but many really don't know how to breathe properly," she says. Yoga emphasizes focus and control on the breath, which can help lower the heart rate and relax the body.

Focus

Think of a race. Your adrenaline is pumping, spectators are cheering on the sidelines, a guy is moving up beside you. Certainly being able to focus your nervous energy into a useful force would be ideal. Yoga can help you do just that, says Birch. "Yoga teaches you how to concentrate while the nervous system is running rampant and is constantly being bombarded with stimuli."

Balance

Practicing yoga poses requires and teaches balance, which is essential for good running form. "My best running performances came from a surrender into steadiness rather than from out-muscling or forcing it," says Steve Ilg, a former world-class runner. "Practice steadiness in holding a yoga pose and the mental concentration and willingness to persevere will immediately transfer into running." And being better balanced will help prevent injuries. "I believe that 99 percent of running injuries are caused by imbalance problems, and yoga is the answer to that," says Birch.

Flexibility

Yoga stretches promote relaxation in the joints, says Marcus Battle, a track and field coach to professional athletes in Silver Springs, Maryland. "Increasing the range of motion in joints not only helps prevent injury by aligning the body but also increases power. Speed comes from power, which comes from range of motion. You have to be in touch with every part of your body to call on whatever you need to perform."