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4H Health - Running
Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service
4-H Club Bulletin
4-H Health Development Committee
Issued June 1980
4 pages

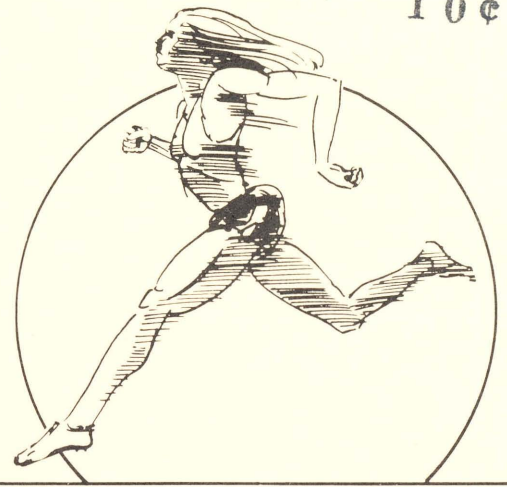
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4-H – Youth Programs • Cooperative Extension Service
Michigan State University 4-H 1137-J
June 1980

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Running

Presented by: Michigan 4-H Health Developmental Committee

The Reasons for Running

Health clearly is the number one reason why so many Americans are running. Studies have shown that regular, vigorous exercise can improve the body's ability to consume oxygen during exertion, lower the resting heart rate, reduce blood pressure, and increase the efficiency of the heart and lungs.

Possibly more important for motivational purposes are the immediate benefits that beginning runners experience. They almost invariably report that they feel better, tire less easily and have fewer illnesses.

Several forms of endurance exercise — cycling, swimming, and cross-country skiing among them — are as effective as running, but running's immense popularity is due to its unique advantages. Some of these are:

Almost everyone can do it. You don't have to take expensive lessons to be a runner. If you can walk, you probably can work up to running. You can learn what you need to know from magazines, books, and acquaintances who are runners.

You can do it almost anywhere. Running doesn't require expensive facilities. You can run in parks, on streets or country roads, in gymnasiums, or on the tracks and running trails found in almost every community. (If you run on roads or streets, stay on the shoulder or close to the curb and run facing traffic. A few localities have banned runners from roadways, so you should check to see if yours is one of them.)

You can do it almost anytime. You don't have to get a team together to run, so you can set your own schedule. Weather doesn't present the same problems and uncertainties that it does in many sports. Running is not a seasonal activity, except in the most extreme climates, and you can do it in daylight or darkness. (Wear light-colored or reflective clothing, and exercise extreme care if you run

at night. Several runners are struck and killed each year by autos.)

It's inexpensive. You don't have to pay to do it, and the only special equipment required is a good pair of running shoes.

Running Style

In most sports we are taught to run for speed and power. In running for fitness the objectives are different and so is the form. Here are some suggestions to help you develop a comfortable, economical running style:

- Run in an upright position, avoiding excessive forward lean. Keep back as straight as you comfortably can and keep head up. Don't look at your feet.
- Carry arms slightly away from the body, with elbows bent so that forearms are roughly parallel to the ground. Occasionally shake and relax arms to prevent tightness in shoulders.
- Land on the heel of the foot and rock forward to drive off the ball of the foot. If this proves difficult, try a more flat-footed style. Running only on the balls of your feet will tire you quickly and make the legs sore.
- Keep stride relatively short. Don't force your pace by reaching for extra distance.
- Breathe deeply with mouth open.

What to Wear

The most important item of apparel for the runner is a pair of sturdy, properly-fitting running shoes. Training shoes with heavy, cushioned soles and arch supports are preferable to flimsy sneakers and racing flats. (Several running magazines annually rate the major brands and popular models.)

Weather will dictate the rest of your attire. As a

general rule, you will want to wear lighter clothing than temperatures might seem to indicate. Running generates a lot of body heat.

Light-colored clothing that reflects the sun's rays is cooler in the summer, and dark clothes are warmer in the winter. When the weather is very cold, it's better to wear several layers of light clothing than one or two heavy layers. The extra layers help trap heat, and it's easy to shed one of them if you become too warm.

You should wear something on your head when it's cold, or when it's hot and sunny. Wool watch caps or ski caps are recommended for winter wear, and some form of tennis or sailor's hat that provides shade and can be soaked in water is good for summer use.

Don't wear rubberized or plastic clothing. Such garments interfere with the evaporation of perspiration and cause body temperature to rise to dangerous levels.

If you dress properly, you can run in almost any weather, but it's advisable not to run when it's extremely hot and humid. On such days, plan to run early in the morning or in the evening.

'Warming Up' and 'Cooling Down'

Now you're ready to begin running — or almost. Stretching exercises should **always** be done before running. They will stretch the muscles you use in running and prepare the joints for movement through a full range of motion.

The six stretching exercises should be repeated during a "cooling down" period following each run. When you have finished running, walk until breathing returns to pre-exercise levels and then do the exercises. This will help prevent muscle soreness and also aid the return of the blood from the extremities to the heart.

Running

Now that you really are ready to run, you may find that you have to begin by walking. If so, don't be discouraged. Few beginners are capable of running continuously for any distance. It probably took you several years to get into the shape you're in, and it will take awhile to repair the neglect. Patience is the key to success.

The "walk test" will help you determine where to begin. If you can comfortably walk three miles in 45 minutes, it's okay to start running. Or, more precisely, alternately running and walking. If you can't pass the test, walk three miles a day until you can.

In the beginning you should alternately run and walk continuously for 20 minutes. Speed is not important, but the amount of time is. It takes about 20 minutes for your body to begin realizing the "training effects" of sustained, vigorous exercise.

No one can tell you exactly how far you should run/walk at the beginning. Exercise capacity varies widely,

even in individuals of similar age and build. Here's a rule of thumb to follow:

After your warmup, walk briskly until you are moving easily. Run at a comfortable pace until you begin to become winded or tired or both. Walk until you're ready to run again. Repeat the cycle until your 20 minutes are up.

The more often you run, the faster you will improve. At least five workouts a week are recommended for persons trying to raise their level of fitness. Three workouts a week generally are considered to be the minimum number needed to maintain a desirable state of fitness.

A "talk test" can help you find the right pace. You should be able to talk while running, or while alternately running and walking. If you're too breathless to talk, you're going to fast.

When you first begin running, progress will seem slow, but gradually in the weeks ahead you will become aware that your strength and staying power are increasing. After eight or 10 weeks, if you work out faithfully, you should be able to run the full 20 minutes at a reasonable pace, although this process may take somewhat longer for older persons.

After you have completed the reconditioning phase, you should extend your run to 30 minutes. Remember, the amount of time you invest is more important than your time for a specific distance.

Stretching Exercises

To minimize the chances of injury or soreness, the following exercises should be done **before** and **after** running. If you find the exercises difficult to perform, you may want to do them twice when warming up to increase flexibility. Stretch slowly and do not bounce to attain prescribed positions.

Anchilles Tendon and Calf Stretcher

Stand facing wall approximately three feet away. Lean forward and place palms of hands flat against wall. Keep back straight, heels firmly on floor, and slowly bend elbows to hands, and tuck hips toward wall. Hold position for 30 seconds. **Repeat exercise with knees slightly flexed.**

Back Stretcher

Lie on back with legs straight and arms at sides with palms down. Slowly lift legs, hips, and lower part of back and attempt to touch toes to floor behind head. Keep legs straight and hold position for 30 seconds.

Thigh Stretcher

Stand arm's length from wall with left side toward wall. Place left hand on wall to support. Grasp right ankle with right hand and pull foot back and up until heel touches buttocks. Lean forward from waist

as you lift. Hold for 30 seconds. **Repeat exercise with opposite hand and foot.**

Hurdler's Stretch

Sit on floor with one leg extended straight ahead. Upper part of other leg should be at right angle to body, with heel close to buttocks. Slowly slide hands down extended leg and touch foot. Hold position for 30 seconds. Keeping legs in same position, slowly lean back and rest elbows on floor. Hold for 30 seconds. **Reverse position and repeat both stages of exercises.**

Straddle Stretch

Sit on floor and spread straight legs about twice shoulder width. Slowly lean forward from waist, sliding hands along floor, as far forward as you can. Hold for 30 seconds. Return to starting position. Slowly stretch forward over right leg, sliding both hands down to right ankle. Try to keep knee straight and touch chin to right knee cap. Hold for 30 seconds. **Return to starting position. Repeat second step of exercise to left side.**

Leg Stretcher

Sit in same position as in preceding exercise. Rest left hand on left thigh and grasp inside of right foot with right hand. Keep back straight and slowly straighten right leg, letting it raise to about a 45 degree angle. Hold position for 30 seconds. **Repeat exercise with other leg.**

A Few Words of Caution

Listen to your body when you run. If you develop pain, or any other unusual symptom, slow down or stop. If the problem persists, see your physician before running again.

Don't compete with others until you are an experienced, well-conditioned runner. Your objective in the beginning should be to steadily improve your own performance, not to run faster than someone else.

The stretching exercises you do before and after running will give you needed flexibility. In addition, you should do some strength exercises, such as push-ups and bent-knee sit-ups, to give your fitness regimen proper balance.

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