Preventing Injuries--*By Robin Constantino*

1. Increase Workout/Activity Time Gradually

Increasing your workout time by about 10% every week is ideal. This allows the body enough time to repair damage that occurs with every increase, which in turn prevents overuse injuries. For example, if you have been running 3 miles a day 3 times a week, start running 3.5 miles 3 times the following week. It is also a good idea to build plateaus to prevent injury. For instance, increase your time a couple of weeks in a row and then hold that time for a few weeks before adding more time.

2. Increase Workout/Activity Intensity Gradually

Increasing your workout intensity 10% each week should be the maximum. Not every workout should leave you gasping. You may start each week with a hard workout due to an intensity increase, but give the body enough time to adapt to the intensity in order to prevent injuries, while still giving your body a great workout and improving performance.

3. Rest between Workouts

Beginners should allow their bodies a full day of rest between each workout to prevent overuse of the muscles and joints. It is a good idea to alternate exercising and taking the day off to rest the body. As you become more advanced you may use a light run or cycle as a rest day. Anyone who does regular working out or activity should allow the body a full week of rest once a year.

4. Alternate between Hard and Easy Workouts

Once your body becomes accustomed to working out a full day of rest every other day is not necessary. However, to prevent overworking your body, you should alternate between easy and hard workouts. An easy day will allow the body to prepare for the next bout of hard exercise, while still getting the heart rate up and continuing to increase muscle strength.

5. Don't Ignore Early Warning Signs of Injury

Your body will tell you if something is not right. When soreness or pain is experienced for more than a couple of hours, apply ice to reduce pain and possible swelling and rest the body for a day or two. Continue to rest your body until the soreness goes away or pain lessens. If the pain persists or gets worse during a workout, stop the activity and look into seeing the doctor.

6. Wear the Right Footwear for your Activity

Pick a shoe that is best for your activity (e.g. running, basketball, cross training, etc.). Regardless of the type of shoe it should fit snugly & provide adequate support & cushioning. Basketball shoes should be used for basketball since they provide adequate ankle support for side-to-side movement. Cross training shoes are good for a lot of different activities, but pure runners should chose running shoes because of the extra padding they have. Replace your shoes every 6-8 months or 300-400 miles.

7. Mix up your Workouts

Cross training (switching up your workout) is a great way to reduce the risk of an over-use injury. Cross-training can include activities such as, running, biking, swimming, and other activities that differ in pressure on the bones and joints. If you are someone who does not like to do anything but run, try running different paths on different terrains to put different pressures on your legs. When weight/strength training, you should alternate days. One day should include lower body and the next day upper body in order to allow the muscles a day of rest and repair.

8. Increase Flexibility and Strength

Adequate levels of flexibility are needed to maintain functional independence that will help to reduce injury. Weak or inflexible muscles will provide a much greater risk for injury. For runners, strengthening the upper body and core will help to counteract the stresses that running places on the legs. Every workout should have at least 5 min of flexibility incorporated in it.

9. Fuel your Body Adequately

Muscles need energy in order to work hard. To give your body enough energy, you should eat foods rich in carbohydrates, protein, and good fats. These three macronutrients are the most important source of energy for the body. And yes, this does include GOOD fats, such as mono and poly unsaturated fats, not trans or saturated fats. Carbohydrates are the number one energy source for the body and should make up the majority of your diet. Protein can be used as a supplemental energy source, but is also important for muscle repair. Vitamins and minerals are also an important fuel source for the body. For instance, calcium is an important component to keeping your bones strong and healthy.

10. Keep the Body Fully Hydrated

Hydration is overlooked a lot of times and people find themselves dehydrated more often than they would think. Dehydrated muscles are more prone to tears then muscles that are hydrated properly. Leaving the body under hydrated can also cause poor performance because the cells will not get adequate fuel replenishment. Each person should drink 8-10 8oz cups of water a day at least. Athletes who exercise at a higher intensity and duration usually need a lot more than that. You should hydrate before, during, and after each workout.