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The Countdown is on...

Race day is just over a month away! If you are following your training plan, you should be well into your race preparation. Despite the fact that the forecast is calling for rain and snow showers the next few weeks, it is important to not deviate from your plan.

One important activity, sometimes ignored by athletes, is consistent stretching. In my clinic, I often hear athletes say they do not set aside time for stretching before or after sports activities. You must remember that running is an activity that uses many different muscle groups. Because multiple muscles from the legs, trunk and arms must work together, you need to stretch to maintain the health/flexibility of the muscles.

All runners are different in regard to their cadence, stride and pattern of running and therefore may use different muscle groups during their run. Athletes also will have different stretching needs based on their bodies. You will likely need to stretch the hamstrings, calves, quads and the iliotibial band. Having an overall stretching program to target multiple muscle groups is a good idea, but depending on tightness or soreness, you also may need to focus on certain areas.

Prior to running, I recommend you participate in dynamic and active isolated stretches. In a dynamic stretch, you move the joint or muscle group through a range of motion without any significant resistance. Some examples of dynamic stretches are leg swings and side lunges. Active isolated stretches call for isolating a muscle, lightly stretching it to an anatomical barrier, holding it for 2-3 seconds, relaxing the stretch and then increasing the range of the stretch each time. Each active isolated stretch should be repeated 8-10 times.

It is also important to do static stretches after your run/cool-down, when your muscles and tendons are warmed up and loose. This stretching will help prepare you for your next run, too. There are many great online stretching programs that you can incorporate into your workout.

Rolling out muscles is another way to target problem areas. Doing yoga or Pilates also will help you maintain flexibility. Ballistic stretching, which is where you bounce as you stretch, is not recommended due to possible injury.

Now that we covered stretching, I would like to recommend a few other things to consider between now and race day:

- Do not change to a new brand of shoes over the next month. Wear what you know.
 - New shoes can alter your running gait and contribute to abnormal mechanics, which can lead to pain and injury.
 - Incorporate hills into your run.
 - There are hills on the course. If you are not ready or have not trained to tackle hills, this will be an area of difficulty.
 - Monitor your hydration status and needs.
 - Stick to your training program.
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- It is important to not deviate from your training program. If you do not feel that you are prepared or comfortable with the 25K distance, do not try to run it! You can switch to the 5K or 10K run through the beginning of May.
- If you feel any abnormal pains that linger for more than a few days, get evaluated.
 - You have been training hard for the Fifth Third River Bank Run and we want you to participate. If you are having any pains that are slowing you down, I would recommend an evaluation with a sports medicine specialist to ensure there is nothing to hold you back.

We are looking forward to May 12. It will be here before we know it. Keep up the excellent work and good luck in your continued training.
