

From the American Statesman

Correspondent Brom Hoban
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Running injuries seem to run in cycles. Right now, for instance, it seems hamstring problems are increasing. Current shoe designs might be at the root of the problem. It is known that certain shoes can increase the prevalence of Achilles' tendonitis. And plantar fasciitis (arch and heel pain) seemed to plague runners more in the 1990s than now. Perhaps advances in running shoes have helped on that front. But hamstring problems are the final frontier. Run for enough years, and you're going to experience pain somewhere along that muscle-tendon. It's that simple. The fact is, chronic hamstring problems are more often the bane of long-term, veteran runners than beginners. The theory here is that years of distance running tightens up the entire backside, which makes it difficult for the hamstring to perform its job. "There is no muscle more fickle for the runner than the hamstring," writes Dr. Norbert Sander, winner of the 1974 New York Marathon, in the "New York Road Runners Complete Book of Running." "Stretching from the ishiotuberosity (the point we sit on) in the pelvis, the hamstring passes down the back of the leg and inserts just across the back surface of the knee. Running parallel to the hamstrings is the sciatic nerve; thus many chronic hamstring strains are mistaken for sciatic nerve damage." The hamstrings (actually a group of three muscles) play a unique role in the

runner's gait. They are active throughout the stride, having the complicated task of stopping your leg at full extension and pulling your heel back up toward your seat. This calls for both concentric and eccentric contractions, which is why the hamstrings so often get injured. In sprinters, the injuries are usually acute, sudden tears, whereas distance runners develop chronic, overuse syndromes. According to Sander, "The hamstring takes the brunt of almost every step and tends to overdevelop and tighten as years of running pass." While many experts call for a stretching/strengthening program, Sanders is quick to point out that stretching the muscle while it's injured can actually make the problem worse. And he goes on to say that weight training to strengthen the injured hamstring is usually not successful, and can worsen the condition. Running expert Jeff Galloway concurs, stating that "stretching will keep the hamstring injured, and weight exercises for the legs are almost always counterproductive to distance running." So what's a hamstring runner to do? Although there is a lot of conflicting advice on this subject, both Sander and Galloway are in complete agreement. I recently spoke with Galloway about my own hamstring problems, and he offered some practical advice. "Don't stop running altogether, but cut down. Try to stay out of the pain threshold - that is, run three to four miles or whatever it is you can before it starts hurting. You might also try cross-friction massage to the injured area. Slowly build back up as you begin to be able to go fur-

ther without any pain. Try to avoid running that will stretch out your stride (and hamstrings), like downhill, or speed training." "The basic philosophy with the injured hamstring is to regroup training and slowly present an increasing workload to the hamstring, allowing it to redefine its balance with the uninjured side, as well as with its agonists, the quadriceps muscles," Sander said. "Pressing on with high levels of training despite pain only causes more micro-tears in the muscle, with resulting scar tissue and the risk of long-term problems." Brom Hoban writes a weekly column about the Central Texas running scene.

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waterfront where you can eat, drink and be merry, shop, look, buy a kite, get some ice cream. The next morning we take a short scenic ferry ride to the island, run the race and then relax in a nice ocean view picnic area while we partake of lobsters, steak, chicken, corn and all the fixing provided by the local Lions club right where the awards ceremony takes place. After an ice cream and ferry ride back in mid afternoon you're free to still have part of weekend remaining. The following week a large crowd does the Portland Friday night scene again for Joan Benoit Samuelson's Beaches to Beacon 10K. This race has a stunning ocean view for the finish, food and festivities. After the race and like the week before, you still have part of a weekend left. There are four New England

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