



## ***CURRENT CONCEPTS IN CROSS TRAINING FOR RUNNERS***

### ***CROSS TRAINING DEFINED***

Cross training is defined as the participation in a variety of sports or athletic activities to maximize the fitness benefits derived from each activity. Two or more types of exercise may be performed in one workout or used alternately in successive workouts. The circuit training approach used by some gyms (i.e. “Curves for Women”) are great manifestations of the cross training principle as they include diverse exercises in a single routing to promote aerobic fitness, strength and muscle endurance.

### **PROS**

- ✦ Cross Training can provide numerous benefits for those aspiring to run a marathon.
- ✦ Adds variety to your training and decreases the chance of burnout.
- ✦ Can occasionally be substituted for “easy day” running.
- ✦ Can serve as an injury prevention measure – activities such as cycling can strengthen related muscle groups with similar movement patterns while reducing the same repetitive stress to the muscle group. Multi-directional activities such as soccer or basketball provide the benefit of developing an equal balance of all the muscles of the lower limb. That way, overuse injuries as a result of muscular imbalance may be minimized.
- ✦ Increases upper body strength – this is of particular importance late in a marathon when upper back and neck muscles become fatigued. Upper body strength is an important asset in running uphill.
- ✦ Cross training may lead to optimal effort; because peak performance in any physical activity usually involves more than one physical attribute (i.e. needing a strong sprint at the end of a race requires high levels of aerobic and anaerobic fitness).
- ✦ Promotes development of your entire body, rather than specific parts or energy systems.
- ✦ Distributes the load of training among various body parts, thus reducing the risk of injury.
- ✦ Allows you to keep training while you are injured.

## CONS

- ☀ Cross training on a scheduled rest day can leave you tired prior to attempting an important workout (i.e. a long run).
- ☀ Some cross training activities can increase the likelihood of injury, particularly during the mileage build-up stage.
- ☀ A recent study of varsity swimmers at the University of Florida showed that 44 % of these athletes' injuries were due to cross training! This study suggests that athletes who train in activities other than their primary sports are MORE susceptible to injuries than those who do not.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- ☀ Cross training is not intended to replace running.
- ☀ Adhere to the principles of specificity of training.
- ☀ Refrain from intense participation in high impact cross training sports or those that require a lot of sudden changes in speed and/or direction.\*\*  
A good rule of thumb when beginning to cross train is to participate at ½ the intensity and duration that you feel you comfortably could. This will decrease your chances of overloading connective tissue, bones and muscles that are not used to such demands.
- ☀ Attempt a number of different types of cross training to determine those that best suite your bodies needs. This should be attempted while still training with low mileage to minimize the likelihood of injury. Listen to your body.
- ☀ Most important; make cross training fun and enjoyable!!!!

*\*\* CROSS TRAINING ALLOWS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW "MUSCLE MOTOR ENGRAMS". AFTER MONTHS OF THE SAME MOVEMENTS YOUR BODY BECOMES EXTREMELY EFFICIENT PERFORMING THESE MOVEMENTS, AND CAN DO SO UNCONSCIOUSLY. WHEN STARTING A NEW EXERCISE, THESE MOTOR ENGRAMS DO NOT EXIST, AND IT TAKES CONSCIOUS THOUGHT TO PERFORM NEW MOVEMENT PATTERNS CORRECTLY. THIS MOTOR LEARNING PERIOD IS THE TIME WHEN WE ARE MOST VULNERABLE TO INJURY FROM A NEW SPORT, HENCE THE IMPORTANCE OF STARTING SLOWLY (1/2 THE INTENSITY AND DURATION OF WHAT YOU "THINK" YOU CAN DO).*

## **EXAMPLES OF GOOD CROSS TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOR RUNNERS**

- ✱ Cycling Swimming
- ✱ Swimming Stair Climbing
- ✱ Strength Training (Circuit Training method)
- ✱ Flexibility Training (Yoga, dedicated stretching)
- ✱ Balance drills (wobble board, Pilates)

It's no coincidence that cycling and swimming are at the top of the cross training list. Triathlons (swim, bike, run) evolved from people's desire to cross train. The requirements of triathlon – high aerobic capacity, great flexibility, well-developed legs and strong swimming specific muscles – all lend themselves to improving your overall fitness for running.

The Principle of Specificity states that the most important form of training for **elite** athletes is that which matches the biomechanics, energy system use, and psychological control factors of an intended competitive performance.

Sport specificity is not as critical for **non-elite** athletes. More of a general fitness approach is suggested to improve overall fitness, enhance all round musculature development, and enhance an overall body awareness with respect to the body's adaptation to exercise.

***PERFORM WELL, PREVENT INJURIES, AND HAVE FUN,  
ADD CROSS TRAINING TO YOUR RUNNING PROGRAM TODAY!***