Damien Howell Physical Therapy

Consecutive Days

For many years I have used the following assumptions when evaluating and managing patients with repetitive use injuries related to running. Running injuries are caused by at least one of three factors. The first factor is excessive amount of running. The second factor is running on an inferior system, that is, the condition of what is being used is inferior. The third factor is the manner of running is funky, or running with improper form.

The first reason an excessive amount of running I sub-divide into running too much, running to fast, and running too soon. Running too much is running to many miles. Running to fast is running at to high of an intensity. Running too early is running too far, too intense before you are in condition to handle the training load – progressing the training load to fast. The obvious conclusion is in order to treat an injury or to avoid an injury the factor of excessive amounts of running must be addressed by either not running, by running less miles, or by decreasing the intensity (speed) of running.

Researchers from the University Of South Carolina School Of Public Health provide data supporting a strategy which addresses the issue of amount of running. The found the greater the number of consecutive days of running the greater the likelihood of developing an injury.

Traditional wisdom suggests that the more you run the greater the risk of injury. According to the researchers how you arrange your running mileage during the course of training of a training week also plays a roll in promoting injury. For instance, running six miles, four times a week could produce a different risk of injury than running twelve miles twice a week even though the total mileage would be the same in each case.

The researchers studied 433 runners over a full year. The runners had been running for nearly eight years, were about forty years of age, and logged about twenty five miles of running per week. During the one-year of study, 65% of the runners reported at least one injury, which was severe enough to cause a loss of training time.

Statistical analysis demonstrated the best predictor of who would experience a running injury was if the runner had had a prior running injury. This has been supported by several other research papers. The

next best predictor of injury was the number of consecutive days run not total mileage run.

Injured runners had run for a total of 130 consecutive days during a 12 month period while non-injured runners had run only 104 consecutive days. Consecutive days were counted as someone who runs on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday during week actually ran on 3 consecutive days that week. A runner who runs on a Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, completed only 2 consecutive days – Wednesday and Thursday, because there are one-day breaks between the other days.

This data suggests that if you are running 40 miles per week, 5 days per week, and running 8 miles per day, it could be less of a risk of injury if you ran 40 miles per week, 4 days per week at 10 miles per run. Another option would be to run 40 miles per week one day, run 19 miles, and run 7 miles for each of the remaining 3 days per week.

Likewise if you run four times per week for a total of 40 miles you could potentially reduce your risk by changing to three times per week totally eliminating consecutive days.

Cutting your number of consecutive workouts undoubtedly produce benefits because of greater recovery time between training sessions. If you run each day, you usually have no more than 22 to 23 hours to recover between runs. Inserting a full recovery day between workouts doubles your recovery time, giving muscles tendons, ligaments, and bones considerably greater chance to heal.

Over the years I have found when counseling injured runners regarding resuming running after an extended lay off, it works quite well to avoid running consecutive days for the initial 3 week period.

The researchers at University of South Carolina did not address the question what is the optimum number of days per week to run and train in order to run faster times. One would think running on consecutive days would result in faster race times. This is a question for future research. In the meantime consider adjusting your training to avoid or minimize the number of consecutive days running in an effort to avoid injury.