

Useful advice and Exercises used by John Harley to help him to 3.12.09 marathon, at age 60 (Tonbridge AC Club Record) – September 2012

THOUGHTS ON CORE STRENGTH AND NUTRITION

Introduction

After running the London Marathon, I consulted with a number of people on what I thought that I had done well and what I could do better. I attach to this note an Appendix of “helpful tips” but this note focuses on the key points bearing in mind that I am 60 and many readers of this note will be teenagers and twenty year olds.

Core Strength

There is a temptation to run, run and run to build up strength and stamina. The feedback that I received was to find ways to build up strength and stamina whilst protecting your legs. Paddy at the TSC had run a programme for me in advance of the London Marathon and we enhanced it for Berlin. The session for London was 40 minutes and we increased it for Berlin to 60 minutes twice per week. This covered :-

1. Cycling for 25 minutes raising the level every two minutes after a five minute warm up. In fact, I used to raise it two levels every two and a half minutes. Over two months, I improved the distance cycled from 10 to 12 kms in the main 20 minute cycle period.
2. I did extensive “step exercising” covering 50 per session on both my right and left leg raising the knee high on each step to effectively build running strength. This paid off in Berlin as I was able to run a fast first 21 kms and maintain pace in the second half of the race.
3. In support of 2 above, I did 50 backward lunges with a medicine ball (3 kg) held high in the air to strengthen my abdomen, glutes and front upper thigh muscles. This benefitted me most of all as it improved muscles in the upper thigh that had probably been rarely exercised. It also improves glutes, knees and calf muscles.
4. The final exercise was a 20kg lift of weights, holding the arms out in front of the knees, lowering the weight and then clenching the buttocks and forcing the weight back up to waist height. Over time, I increased this lift to 25 kg BUT was careful not to take it any further as I did not want to add unnecessary muscle.
5. The session was finished with at least ten to fifteen minutes of stretching to ensure that I kept supple (admittedly more important with an older person) but important for younger people too. The most used stretches are shown below.

I am also recommending a leading US book called “Run Less, Run Faster” which is my running bible. The second edition has many of these stretches illustrated. It is c £4 from Amazon for the on-line version.

Nutrition

This is an area that I completely under-estimated for my first two marathons and for part of my third marathon but what a difference it makes.

1. Ensure that you eat enough! Each mile run burns 115kcal in addition to your normal 2,500 kcal per day. So a ten mile run will require 3,650kcal that day.
2. Ensure that you eat protein as this was my error. I focused on pasta and fresh fruit. Aim for 1.3g per Kg of body weight per day. Note, this refers to true protein NOT the weight of the food. Chicken, fish and beef provide about 1/3 of their (described) weight in protein value.

3. Do eat beans, rice, pasta whole grain breads and potatoes and also fat from butter, olive oil, cheese, nuts and oily fish(salmon, sardines and mackerel).
4. Pre-training food - this is quite difficult particularly if you like to be out early as I do. Try to eat one and preferably two hours before training. Focus on carbohydrates with a small amount of protein eg porridge with milk, honey, toast with cheese, fruit and yoghurt.
5. Post-training food - eat within 2 hours of your training session with a mix of carbohydrate and protein. I found that scrambled eggs and bacon worked well. After hard or long sessions take light protein /carb mix within 45 mins of finishing eg banana and yoghurt, toast and peanut butter, milkshake/smoothie made with milk/fruit.
6. Also take electrolyte replacement tablets after a hard training session. I found "HighFive" to be very good (recommended by my daughter who is a serious Fell Runner).
7. Sleep is necessary for repairing the body so make sure that you have enough.

Exercises used

Kneel on the floor and stretch left and right knee out as far as possible to stretch the groin muscles. Lean forward so that back is parallel to the floor and breathe in through nose and out through the mouth. (My masseur rates this as the best stretch there is). Hold both legs into groin and pull in as tight as possible. Over weeks this improves the muscle tone and suppleness.

The important thing here is to spread the legs to stretch the groin.



This exercise can also be developed by moving the hands gradually to the left and right. It helps keep the back loose and flexible.



I find that this gives me great suppleness and flexibility



The more one does the groin stretch then the easier this exercise. Nevertheless, very important. From the same position, stretch out one leg whilst other is held in the groin and hold your extended foot. Hold this stretch for at least two minutes and you can feel the difference.



I find that this stretch really relieves tight upper leg and knee muscles. I try to do it a number of times weekly.

This is my favourite stretch. I always have a stiff left leg and this always relieves it (see next photo). It also ensures that your core is strong. My favourite stretch is push out your right/left leg in front of you, then turn your torso so that your left/right (respectively) hand sits in your instep. Hold your right/left hand respectively high in the air and look up towards it. This improves the core and also gives a terrific stretch of the calves and lower thigh muscles. I always feel better afterwards



On stretches, do not underestimate them. I have kept injury free this year and run my fastest ever half and two full marathons. This is not coincidental!

HELPFUL RUNNING TIPS

Here are some helpful thoughts which have made a great difference to me.

There are many Running Books but the best that I have found is Run Less, Run Faster, by Bill Pierce. It is sponsored by Runners' World magazine. It can be obtained on line from Amazon. Purchase the second edition. It sets out details on nutrition, exercises and running programmes. It is very well researched and has many runners providing data and feedback.

To assist in keeping your calves in shape, I was advised to wear calf sleeves at night. These are rather like compression socks for airline travel but they make a huge difference. I have had no calf trouble this year other than repair AFTER my two marathons. You can purchase them on line from "Sweatshop". The calf sleeves that I bought were made by Skins.

Running clockwise. In 2011, I started to suffer injuries because I was always running on the track anti-clockwise and on the road face on to the traffic. I found that this meant that my left leg was not always being fully extended but my right leg was. As a result, I now run over half of my laps on the track clockwise to balance up the strain that is being placed on my right high and left knee. I try to run on pavements in town and on country lanes in the middle of the road listening/looking carefully for vehicles. The greatest danger is posed by cyclists with their heads down!

There is much talked about hydration. Do keep hydrated but do not over hydrate. At the Berlin marathon one of the Physicians from St Thomas' Hospital was also running at 70. He says that they treat about 20 runners annually at the London Marathon for over-hydration. The treatment is a packet of salted crisps!

Gels and electrolytes. There are plenty of natural products that do NOT upset your stomach. Do avoid products that include caffeine eg Lucozade. High Five and GU Energy gels are good examples of quality non-caffeinated products. I used both at the Berlin marathon.

Massage - if you can afford these do have them. I have one a month when I am in training, one in the week before a major event and one a day or so after a major event. Go to the same person so that they know you and your body. Do not chop and change once you have found someone reliable. (I am willing to assist anyone who needs advice).

Running Shoes - they are NOT all the same. Do be selective as they might not suit you even if you go to a reputable store. For example, Run and Become sold me some Brooks Shoes ahead of my first marathon the Athens Classic. They did not suit my running style and I suffered with them. I prefer Asics and Nike and I am lucky enough not to pronate. Do take advice, do not rush a decision on buying shoes.

John Harley