

James Thompson: Running Rehabilitation Pathways

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Background

I'm a physiotherapist and running coach specialising in the rehabilitation of running injuries. I typically work with runners between the ages of 25-50 who are competing in events of 10k and above, and are having problems with running performance or recurrent injuries. However, as well as fixing injuries, I teach people to run better and faster.

I now work at Optima Sports Medicine in Kelvin Grove and prior to this I was the lead running specialist for London's largest and most successful private physiotherapy group. I have a strong athletics background, winning New Zealand junior pole vault and sprint relay titles, as well as providing medical and coaching coverage at major national events.

The recent swing back towards barefoot and minimalist running has given the running industry a good shake up. In general, people are becoming more and more aware of more details of running form, shoes and training programmes. However the same simple mistakes are continually being made that lead to injury and poor performance.

Opportunity

Over the past ten years running participation has gone through a period of rejuvenation. With participation numbers increasing, associated businesses and product offerings (running magazines, running books, running specialists) have multiplied to capitalise on this demand.

In the local market this revolution has been profound. Since 2005 the Gold Coast Marathon and Run Festival has doubled in size, enjoying yearly record participation numbers (28,244 in 2012) and was awarded an IAAF Road Race Bronze label in 2013. Alongside this boom in running, it has been suggested that up to 70% of runners will suffer some sort of overuse injury in any given year (Sports Medicine Australia).

While there is a long way to go with regards to truly being able to prove the best ways of developing a runner and preventing injury, there is an ever-increasing collection of research that points us in the right direction for minimising the risk of injury. It is not as simple as changing footwear – it must be individualised to each athlete and the specific load they are being placed under.

By reducing injury risk we can avoid training time being lost, reduced training capacity and potential drop out, not to mention increased potential for complications later on in life. Reducing injury prevalence also gives hope to runners who fail to develop their potential due to recurrence of injury.

Philosophy

I firmly believe that barefoot running is the 'Gold Standard' of running form and our movement patterning for running well should aim to work off this model. As a result of poor

running skill and oversubscription to overly supportive footwear, I believe there has been a continuous wave of unnecessary, preventable injuries. Any changes (whether it be shoes, training or loading) must be made safely and steadily over a period of time.

My aim in athletics has always been to support injury prevention and performance optimisation in collaboration with both coach and athlete. As a physiotherapist in sport, I feel I have a unique offering to make in rehabilitation and performance.

Product Offering

Over the past three years I have been working as a running specialist in London's largest physiotherapist company as a clinical director. During this time I developed a running specialisation product that benefits runners and goes beyond regular clinic treatment and basic rehabilitation packages.

The product encompasses physical screening, physiotherapy assessment, running technique and injury rehabilitation, across three pathways options. They include:

1. Running Assessment – basic form, biomechanics, identify irregularities, screening
2. Injury Management - clinical physiotherapy and rehabilitation
3. Running Technique - re-education, patterning, transition, efficiency

While the pathways are all separate, each running client is strongly advised to complete a running assessment in addition to their running injury management sessions. This will lead into promoting the value of future longitudinal running technique sessions (e.g. 1, 4, 12, 24 weeks) to monitor their progress and ensure their ongoing rehabilitation is effective.

Secondary pathways include:

4. Event preparation – pre-conditioning, load monitoring, injury management, streamlined training process
5. 'Conditioning for running' and strength and conditioning referral plans

Outlook

I am looking to work with enterprising coaches and clubs to provide comprehensive running services for the benefit of athletes in their search for injury-free, enjoyable and successful running.