

New Look!

Women's Running

May 2016

"Without sounding melodramatic, running has changed my life"
- Meet cover star Sophie Raworth, p8

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ABOUT PAIN

8 SMART FIXES
FOR RUNNING
PROBLEMS



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1
At the bottom of the pain scale, all is good



2
Pushing the pace - the pain/pleasure border



3
We can't pretend to enjoy this much longer



4
We're runners, so we don't cry from pain...



5
... Well, not until now!



6
"Why did I start running?" Kinda pain



7
Pain beyond the ability to mean about it



8
Language-warning level of pain



9
Off the pain chart and onto the floor

We've all read the race slogan "Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional," but have you ever stopped to consider why we feel pain at all? "The main function of acute pain is to alert us to the fact we're been injured, thus prompting the need for rest and recovery," says Dr Stephen Humble, consultant in pain medicine at the London Pain Clinic (londonpainclinic.com) and Charing Cross Hospital. "Hence it's beneficial in that it prevents us making an injury worse."

However, for us runners, the issue of pain is a complex one: "One of the main difficulties is that runners have to distinguish between pain and physical exertion," says Michael Nicol of Synergy Physio (synergyphysio.co.uk). "What many of us might consider to be pain, someone such as Jessica Ennis-Hill might think of as just a good training session!" According to physiotherapist Kathleen Walker (penarthphysiotherapy.com), people involved in endurance sports such as distance running accustom themselves to a certain level of discomfort. "They become skilled at dampening down pain sensations and acknowledging them but not necessarily giving in to them," she says.

"Running should not cause pain but will often be uncomfortable," says Paul Hough,

a sport/exercise scientist based at St Mary's University, Twickenham (stmarys.ac.uk/sport-and-health-services). "Athletes are able to tolerate higher levels of discomfort for longer periods because they accept that it's necessary for enhancing performance. They also develop the ability to tell the difference between abnormal pain caused by an injury and normal discomfort due to exercise, which means they can continue pushing themselves."

For those who find making this distinction difficult, Nicol says that it's generally safe to assume that a dull ache that's non-specific in nature and comes on during exercise is probably training discomfort. "This is particularly the case if the feeling goes away within minutes of stopping exercising," he says. The kind of pain that shouldn't be run through is any pain that can be described as sharp, shooting or stabbing, says Hough. "In this instance I'd advise seeing a sports therapist to determine what's causing it, as ignoring it is likely to cause long-term issues." Nicol also cautions that when running we should be on the lookout for signs of heart problems (chest pain, shortness of breath) and heat stroke (headaches, lack of sweating, dizziness, vomiting), and seek immediate medical assistance should we become aware of them.

PAIN, PAIN, GO AWAY

RUNNERS HAVE A REPUTATION AS MASOCHISTS. BUT CAN PAIN FROM RUNNING EVER BE USEFUL? WE FIND OUT HOW - OR WHEN - WE SHOULD TRY TO COPE WITH IT

WORDS: LISA JACKSON

THE TOUGHER SEX?

Many people believe women have a higher pain threshold than men: "They usually cite the rigors of childbirth as proof of this," says Dr Dugdale. "However, studies have shown that men reach a threshold for registering pain later than women."

So if women aren't in fact better at pushing through pain, what explains the way ultramarathon runners such as Pam Reed, who came first overall in the 135-mile Badwater Ultramarathon (twice), are able to compete with men on an equal footing? "Although, for the vast majority of sports, male athletes have a physical advantage, when it comes to extreme endurance events

"PAIN THAT IS ANTICIPATED AND PLANNED FOR, AND OF KNOWN DURATION, IS MUCH EASIER TO DEAL WITH"

there appears to be little difference between the sexes," says Dr Humble. "This is perhaps because in these events psychological resilience is disproportionately important. For example, women tend to be less reckless than men which means they may be more likely to conserve their energy by pacing themselves rather than burning themselves out in the way that many over-competitive men can do."

MIND OVER MATTER

The experience of pain is very subjective and the ability to deal with it varies widely between individuals. "Psychological factors play a huge role in our response to tissue injury," says Dr Humble. "For example, some people may complain of excruciating pain after trivial injuries, while in 1946 researchers were surprised to find that many World War II soldiers with acute severe injuries reported no pain and declined painkillers."

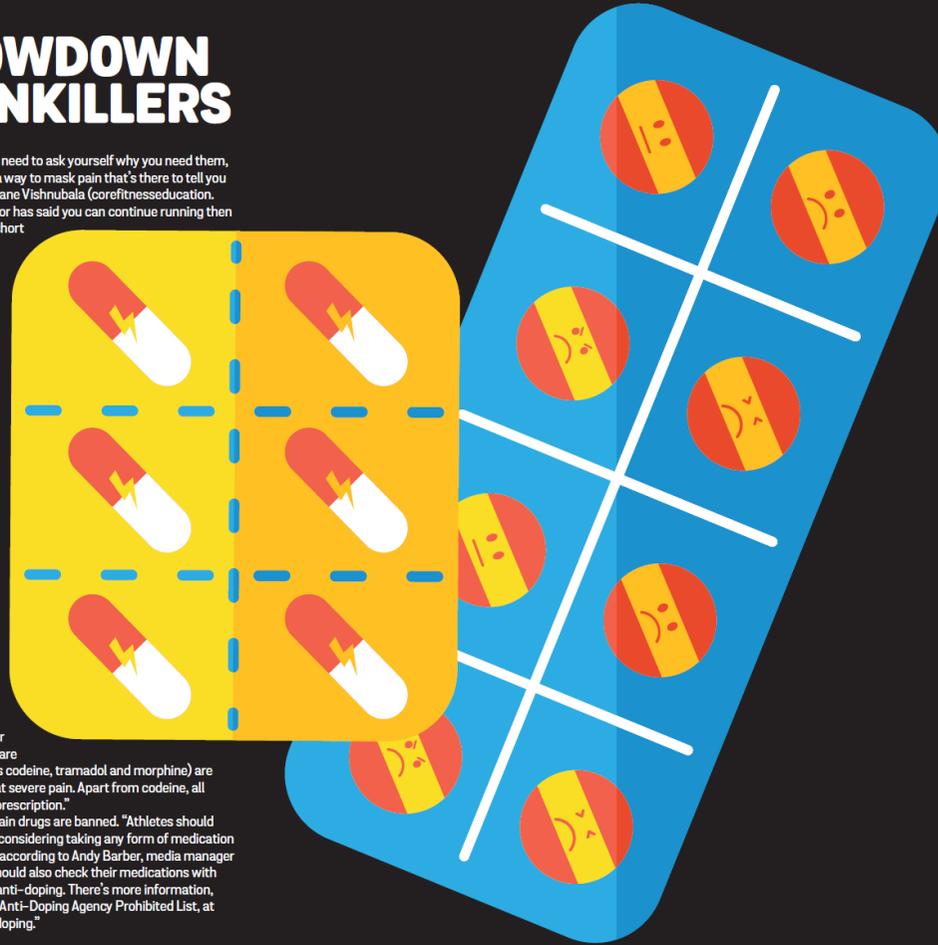
Hough agrees: "A number of non-physical factors affect pain, for example, an injury often feels worse when the athlete can see physical symptoms such as swelling or bleeding," he says. Sports physician Dr

THE LOWDOWN ON PAINKILLERS

"Before taking painkillers you need to ask yourself why you need them, as they shouldn't be used as a way to mask pain that's there to tell you that you're injured," says Dr Dane Vishnubala (corefitnesseducation.co.uk). "However, if your doctor has said you can continue running then using most painkillers in the short term will not be problematic."

The two most commonly used painkillers are non-steroidal antiinflammatories (NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen and naproxen), which also reduce inflammation, and paracetamol (such as Panadol), which also reduces fever. "Used long term, NSAIDs can cause kidney problems and stomach ulcers and increase your risk of heart disease, and so should be avoided by those with stomach or heart problems," warns Dr Vishnubala. "Naproxen is not thought to increase the risk of heart problems, however. Take NSAIDs with food to reduce the effects on your stomach. Paracetamol is arguably the safest type of painkiller but should be avoided by those with liver problems. You can use paracetamol and ibuprofen together but if you're having to double up consider whether you need to consult a healthcare professional. Opiates (such as codeine, tramadol and morphine) are strong painkillers used to treat severe pain. Apart from codeine, all opiates are only available on prescription."

And don't forget that certain drugs are banned. "Athletes should refer to their doctor if they're considering taking any form of medication when training or competing," according to Andy Barber, media manager at England Athletics. "They should also check their medications with regard to any restrictions on anti-doping. There's more information, including details of the World Anti-Doping Agency Prohibited List, at britishathletics.org.uk/anti-doping."



Ciodagh Dugdale (fitgainsportstherapy.com) adds that people's expectation of pain during activity may also modify their response to it. "Pain that is anticipated and planned for, and of known duration, is much easier to deal with," she says.

So can we teach ourselves to handle pain better by simply changing our mindset? The good news is that all of our experts agreed that we can (see their tips for doing so below).

"With practice you can learn to understand your body's response to pain and look upon it as a friend and motivator and use it to improve performance," says clinical hypnotherapist Peter Mabbutt (petermabbutt.net). "But like a good friend it should be listened to, even if it's telling you something you don't want to hear."

FUN AND EASY WAYS TO SEND PAIN PACKING



"Chewing a sweet can help direct your attention away from negative sensations," says Walker. "Or try reading the inspirational posters that people hold up."



"Research conducted at Keele University found that participants who swore at will could endure pain nearly 50% longer than those who didn't," says Dr Dugdale.



"While running, imagine that as you exhale you're breathing out the pain," suggests Mabbutt. "As you inhale, breathe in the comfort that will soothe the discomfort."



"Chatting to your fellow runners, or focusing on competing with them, will spur you on and distract you from discomfort," says Dr Humble.