WHAT WE'RE READING...

7 Ways to Recover From a Run

You've just crushed your run, and you're on top of the world. You start heading toward home, as you think about the next part of your day. But then… uh-oh, what's that achy feeling in your legs? And why are you so. darn. tired?

Recovery needs to be a priority to help your body get over the stress of running. We asked four running coaches for advice on recovering from an everyday run, and they all seemed to agree on seven key points.

1. Cool Down

The end of your run is not the end of your workout. A proper cooldown is an important first step to jump-starting your recovery process. This can include static or dynamic stretching, drills or walking to steady your heart rate and prevent tight muscles post-run.

"After runs, I like to include some walking as a cooldown. Even if you have only five extra minutes, a brief walk will help your heart rate and breathing return to normal and allow for a smooth transition into your next activity."

— Megan Harrington, Cambridge, New York

"Add in some marching or easy skipping drills that will help aid in your cooldown. These can also provide muscle memory for good running form."

— Beth Shaw, Clearwater, Florida

2. Rehydrate

Running means sweating, and sweating means losing valuable fluids. Hydrating is a crucial component of any physical activity, especially if you want to avoid muscle cramps, extreme fatigue and dizziness or fainting.

"Hydration post-run is a must! Ideally, this would be an electrolyte-infused drink like Nuun or Smartwater. Replenishing lost fluids is top on my to-do list after any run."

— Abby Bales, New York City

"I always recommend drinking at least 16 ounces of water after every run. If your run was particularly long or conditions were hot, try a half-and-half mix of water and sports drink instead."

— Harrington

3. Refuel

While you might not feel like downing a full meal immediately after your run, try to eat a balanced mix of carbohydrates and protein (3:1 or 4:1 ratio) as soon as you can stomach food. A solid post-run meal or snack will provide your muscles with much-needed nutrients to repair any damage that occurred during your run.

"It's important to refuel your muscles within 20 to 30 minutes. If your run was less than an hour, shoot for something with fewer calories that still packs a great nutritional punch, like an egg white omelet with spinach and a small side of fruit."

4. Stretch

Not only does stretching increase your flexibility and range of motion, it also releases endorphins that can improve your mood and reduce stress. Plus, it just feels good.

"Post-run is the ideal time for deep, sustained stretches. Flip on 'Game of Thrones,' and hold each stretch for 45 to 90 seconds, concentrating on all four sides of your body."

— Bales

"Since I don't have a lot of time to stretch, I like to do some simple stretches throughout the day to help with recovery and relaxation. I sit at a desk all day, so these help in that department too. I do basic stretches from touching my toes to rolling my head, but a little goes a long way."

— Shaw

5. Active Recovery

Contrary to what you might believe — or want to believe — recovery doesn't mean lounging on the couch for the rest of the day. Studies have shown that active recovery methods can actually reduce muscle fatigue and soreness when compared with other methods of recovery.

"Don't sit all day. It can be tempting to put your feet up for the rest of the day – after all, you already got your workout in so no need to push it! Make sure you get up and move around to stretch out your legs. It will also help with muscle soreness."

— Lora Johnson, Austin, Texas

6. Monitor and Adjust

Taking note of things that don't feel quite right can help you avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Evaluate any pain you might be having, or look back on the good and bad parts of your run and use those lessons to improve.

"Check in with yourself mentally and physically after a run. Were your legs feeling sluggish? Is your calf hurting? Monitoring how you feel and adjusting future runs and workouts will help you ward off injury and burnout before they become major problems."

— Harrington

7. Find Your Personal Recovery Approach

While the aforementioned tips can be used as general post-run advice, the perfect recovery formula is not one size fits all. What works for one runner might not be right for someone else. In order to find recovery tactics that are right for your lifestyle and body, test different tools and tricks to measure their ability to prepare you for your next run or workout.

"Compression socks, like those from PRO Compression, help to increase blood flow, which improves your muscle recovery. You can even wear some underneath your work pants for the day. These socks are also really good to wear while you are running."

— Johnson

"Foam rolling can loosen tight muscles, break up knots and increase blood flow. If you're new to it, I'd suggest focusing on areas that are commonly tight in runners — the IT band, hamstrings and calves. Start with a five-minute session and work up from there."

— Harrington

Whether your run is one mile or one hour, heed this advice to aid recovery and be ready for the next time you lace up.

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