

Balance It

Three alternate therapies to help you run longer and stronger. BY HARRIET EDMUND

WHEN MELISSA HERNADI ran her first marathon in 1990 her body rose to the challenge. “I didn’t have a proper training regime, so it was sheer determination that got me over the line,” she recalls. But by the time she ran her last race – a 1.36 half marathon in Melbourne 10 years later – Hernadi’s body (and mind) were calling out for some tender loving care.

“After running for so long and using the same muscles over and over, I could feel parts of my body were really tight and I was starting to get some annoying niggles.”

Her solution? Yoga.

YOGA FOR RUNNERS

Yoga postures – or asanas – engage, strengthen and place demands on all of the intrinsic muscle groups, which support and stabilise the skeletal system, says Hernadi, now a qualified yoga instructor (yogainbayside.com.au). “This can balance out overworked muscles from running and increase the fluidity of the entire body.”



TUNE UP: Yoga can help balance out overworked muscles.

FOR THE BODY → Yoga is proven to help open and strengthen parts of the runner’s body that suffer common overuse injuries such as Iliotibial Band Syndrome (ITB), where the ITB band that spans from the hip to the shin becomes inflamed, patellofemoral tendonitis, better known as runners knee, and hip bursitis, an inflammation of the bursa over the outside of the hip joint.

The Yin (or soft) approach of yoga, that Hernadi teaches in her ‘yoga for athletes’ classes, focuses on holding floor asanas targeting the lower back, hips and hamstrings to help release and strengthen the connective tissue that encases the entire body. For many runners it’s this tissue that becomes tense and restricted leading to injury. [See the RW Yoga Class with Hernadi at runnersworldonline.com.au/video](http://runnersworldonline.com.au/video).

FOR THE MIND → It’s the nasal breathing technique called Ujjayi used in yoga that helps ease tension and relax the entire body, says Hernadi. “This focused breathing also helps transport a rich supply of blood to your lungs increasing your lung capacity – key to enhancing both energy and stamina,” she says. The mindfulness of yoga makes runners more conscious of body alignment and posture, and heightens awareness of your body’s limitations and needs.

[Find your local yoga class at yogafinder.com](http://yogafinder.com).

SPORTS KINESIOLOGY

Sports kinesiology is a study of the connection between your mind and body. It uses muscle testing as well as western and eastern based healing techniques to improve your running.

FEEL BETTER

Nasal breathing techniques often used in yoga, kinesiology and visualisation, help runners regulate their breathing on the track and can improve stamina.

41 Percentage of RW pollsters who say yoga is a regular part of their training week.

Helen Mavrokefalos, sports kinesiology practitioner (clearmindandbody.com.au), says kinesiology can ease pain, stress, muscular and nervous disorders, and detect allergies and nutritional deficiencies.

FOR THE BODY → To check if the muscles and nervous system are communicating properly a sports kinesiology practitioner conducts a number of muscle and orthopaedic tests, and assesses your posture and movement.

Mavrokefalos says this is done because there are a number of causes for physical or emotional stress on a runner’s body. For example, she says, if a runner has tight calves it could be due to the connective tissue linking various muscle networks being out of balance, or an emotional stress manifesting itself in the muscles.

Once the cause for the stress has been indentified healing techniques using exercise, posture realignment, the Chinese acupoint system and Buteyko breathing – just to name a few – are used to improve alignment, and harmony of the mind and body.

Mary Tomic, 33, of Melbourne, says kinesiology changed her life – and her running. “It structurally changed the way I ran by improving my balance and range of motion, and emotionally it helped me address personal barriers that were preventing me from taking my running to the next level,” says the runner of five years.

FOR THE MIND → Thoughts, beliefs and attitudes impact our everyday lives as well as our running performance, says Mavrokefalos. So, kinesiology uses various techniques to help runners visualise success based on performance goals. “It could be that aspects of Chinese medicine, the Indian based chakra system

(focusing on the body’s seven energy processing centres) or flower essences are used to realign emotions that get in the way of a good run,” says Mavrokefalos.

[To book an assessment see akakinesiology.org.au](http://akakinesiology.org.au) or kinesiology.org.nz.

VISUALISATION

Visualisation is a relaxation technique that can help prepare your mind and body for the pressures of a race or tough training session. Tim Noakes writes in *Lore of Running* it’s where a runner can literally train their subconscious to take charge without interference from the conscious brain.

FOR THE BODY → Dr Steve Bannon, coordinator of sports science at the Victorian Institute of Sport, says visualisation helps hardwire the body to perform the way you want it to. But he warns for some runners it can have a negative effect. “Sometimes athletes can see themselves failing or hitting the wall,” he says. David Foran, a Melbourne psychophysicologist, says to avoid this try visualising or anticipating the point in your run when fatigue might set in, so that when it does you can recall a mental image of yourself running strong and efficiently. “This could delay the onset of fatigue and will certainly make you feel better,” he says.

FOR THE MIND → Before competing Dr Bannon says Australian athletes spend one hour a week using visualisation techniques as part of their race preparation. “We ask the athletes to write a script about how they see their event unfolding including how they want to feel and what they’ll be thinking about on the day,” he says. The mental preparation of tapping into all your senses – vision, hearing, smell, touch, taste and motion – could be just the edge you need come race-day.

[Find a sports psychologist at psychology.org.au](http://psychology.org.au) or psychology.org.nz. **RW**