



# Here's To Your Health!

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## New Year's Resolution No-nos

by Anastasia Poland for MSN Health & Fitness

Do you see New Year's Eve as a great time to make resolutions you will inevitably break? You're not alone. However, a University of Washington study by Elizabeth Miller and Alan Marlatt found that a full 63 percent of people do stick to their primary resolutions for at least two months. It can be done. Here are the top five reasons why we don't keep our resolutions past February:

**Reality Check 101:** Unrealistic goals are a real killer for achieving change. Instead of cutting "all sugars and carbs" from your diet or deciding to "exercise every single day," consider moderation. Unless you have health constraints, an occasional carb can be a reward, especially after you've created an attainable exercise plan for your busy schedule. Also make sure the resolutions on your list are purely for you—not your partner, your family, or your friends. If you're not doing them for yourself, you won't end up doing them at all.

**Resolutions con't. on page 2**



## THE PERFECT FORM

### Running better, from head to toe

By Jane Unger Hahn for Runner's World

6/16/05

**Head Tilt** How you hold your head is key to overall posture, which determines how efficiently you run. Let your gaze guide you. Look ahead naturally, not down at your feet, and scan the horizon. This will straighten your neck and back, and bring them into alignment. Don't allow your chin to jut out.

**Shoulders** Shoulders play an important role in keeping your upper body relaxed while you run, which is critical to maintaining efficient running posture. For optimum performance, your shoulders should be low and loose, not high and tight. As you tire on a run, don't let them creep up toward your ears. If they do, shake them out to release the tension. Your shoulders also need to remain level and shouldn't dip from side to side with each stride.

**Arms** Even though running is primarily a lower-body activity, your arms aren't just along for the ride. Your hands control the tension in your upper body, while your arm swing works in conjunction with your leg stride to drive you forward. Keep your hands in an unclenched fist, with your fingers lightly touching your palms. Imagine yourself trying to carry a potato chip in each hand without crushing it. Your arms should swing mostly forward and back, not across your body, between waist and lower-chest level. Your elbows should be bent at about a 90-degree angle. When you feel your fists clenching or your forearms tensing, drop your arms to your sides and shake them out for a few seconds to release the tension.

**Torso** The position of your torso while running is affected by the position of your head and shoulders. With your head up and looking ahead and your shoulders low and loose, your torso and back naturally straighten to allow you to run in an efficient, upright position that promotes optimal lung capacity and stride length. Many track coaches describe this ideal torso position as "running tall" and it means you need to stretch yourself up to your full height with your back comfortably straight. If you start to slouch during a run take a deep breath and feel yourself naturally straighten. As you exhale simply maintain that upright position.

*Running Form continued on page 2*



## Hoops Fat Blaster by Alan Stein C.S.C.S. for Menshealth.com

**1.** Sit at one baseline and hold a basketball in front of your chest. Stand up and sit down without letting your arms, hands, or the ball touch the floor. Repeat 10 times, then sprint to the other baseline.

**2.** Assume a pushup position, but with one hand on the ball. Perform a pushup, then roll the ball to the other hand and repeat. That's 1 rep. Aim for 10, and then sprint back to the other baseline.

**3.** Hold the top of a pushup on the ball for 1 minute. Rest 30 seconds. Repeat the entire sequence 4 to 6 times.

## Running Form continued from page 1

**Hips** Your hips are your center of gravity, so they're key to good running posture. The proper position of your torso while running helps to ensure your hips will also be in the ideal position. With your torso and back comfortably upright and straight, your hips naturally fall into proper alignment--pointing you straight ahead. If you allow your torso to hunch over or lean too far forward during a run, your pelvis will tilt forward as well, which can put pressure on your lower back and throw the rest of your lower body out of alignment. When trying to gauge the position of your hips, think of your pelvis as a bowl filled with marbles, then try not to spill the marbles by tilting the bowl.

**Legs/Stride** While sprinters need to lift their knees high to achieve maximum leg power, distance runners don't need such an exaggerated knee lift--it's simply too hard to sustain for any length of time. Instead, efficient endurance running requires just a slight knee lift, a quick leg turnover, and a short stride. Together, these will facilitate fluid forward movement instead of diverting (and wasting) energy. When running with the proper stride length, your feet should land directly underneath your body. As your foot strikes the ground, your knee should be slightly flexed so that it can bend naturally on impact. If your lower leg (below the knee) extends out in front of your body, your stride is too long.

**Ankles/Feet** To run well, you need to push off the ground with maximum force. With each step, your foot should hit the ground lightly--landing between your heel and midfoot--then quickly roll forward. Keep your ankle flexed as your foot rolls forward to create more force for push-off. As you roll onto your toes, try to spring off the ground. You should feel your calf muscles propelling you forward on each step. Your feet should not slap loudly as they hit the ground. Good running is springy and quiet.

## Resolutions con't. from page 1

**No plan of attack:** Being impulsive might spice up a romance, but where resolutions are concerned, less is more. Several excellent ways for "setting yourself up for resolution failure," says Marlatt, are not planning out your resolutions until the last minute or making them based on your mindset on New Year's Eve. Planning, then assessing what obstacles may inhibit your goals (e.g., you want to cut junk food from your diet, but live in a household of junk-food junkies) will help you evaluate what changes you need to make.

**K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple, Stupid):** What's with the 10 resolutions on that list? Take off your overachiever cape and toss it aside. Too many folks overwhelm themselves by attempting several big life changes simultaneously. Choose one or two achievable goals that introduce positive changes into your life instead of forcing yourself to quit all of your bad habits at once. The confidence you gain by following one new healthy life pattern can later be parlayed into ditching another unhealthy one. Miller found that confidence was the key underlying factor in people creating true change.

**More or less:** These words are the enemies of goal attainment. More healthy, less weight? What does this mean in real terms? Those who fall off the resolution wagon often neglect to quantify goals or set deadlines. If you want to feel healthier, write a list of what that means to you (for example, attend yoga class twice weekly, add two veggies to daily diet, lose 10 pounds by March, get monthly massages) and work from there.

**If at first you don't succeed:** This old axiom is so true, yet we do ourselves a great disservice by not making sure to "try, try again." If you sneak a snack, leave work early or indulge that TV craving, it doesn't mean you have to abandon your commitment. Persistence is key. Miller discovered that only 40 percent of people polled achieved their goals the first time around. Seventeen percent succeeded after more than six tries. Adds Marlatt, "It's a mistake to blame yourself if you fail. Instead, look at the barriers that were in your way. See how you can do better the next time and figure out a better plan to succeed. You do get to try again ."

Prime yourself for successful resolutions by being realistic, taking small steps, recognizing success and being flexible when you backslide. By keeping at it and not throwing in the towel the first time you skip a workout or give into a craving, you will be able to make positive changes that will last all year and beyond.

## Ask the Trainer: by I.M. Cut

**Dear Mr. Cut:** I've always stretched before jogging but have recently heard that not only is there no benefit to this, but that it can actually be detrimental. What's your take on stretching?

Signed: Still Stretching



**Dear Still Stretching:** Very good question. I'll defer the answer to something I found on Runner's World website. Good luck.

## Does Stretching Prevent Injuries?

Everyone knows that flexibility is good for runners, right?

Too bad medical research doesn't agree.

By Amby Burfoot for Runners World.

8/26/2004



...as the running population keeps booming, the question of stretching's value is more important than ever. No wonder a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control received so much attention. It, too, cast doubt on the effectiveness of stretching, concluding, "There is not sufficient evidence to endorse or discontinue routine prerun or postrun stretching to prevent injury among competitive or recreational athletes."

I always thought the folks at the CDC worked around the clock on SARS, HIV, and the biohazards of sci-fi movies. These people have time for sore Achilles tendons?

Stephen Thacker, M.D., the study's head author, assures me he has spent many years in public health surveillance, epidemiology, and infectious diseases. But, he says, obesity is costing the United States more than \$100 billion a year, and the CDC believes that more exercise could reduce this healthcare burden. "We want to promote physical activity," says Dr. Thacker, "but we have to look at all the things that either encourage or discourage exercise, such as the amount of time it takes to exercise, and the injuries you can get. We look for the science before we make any recommendations."

For Dr. Thacker's paper "The Impact of Stretching on Sports Injury Risk: A Systematic Review of the Literature," he and his colleagues pored over nearly 100 other published medical studies on the subject. Their key conclusions: stretching does increase flexibility; the highest-quality studies indicate that this increased flexibility doesn't prevent injuries; few athletes need extreme flexibility to perform their best (perhaps just gymnasts and figure skaters); and more injuries would be prevented by better warmups, by strength training, and by balance exercises, than by stretching.

Ian Shrier, M.D., a past president of the Canadian Society of Sports Medicine, has been drilling into the stretching literature since the early 1990s. In a 1999 paper titled "Stretching Before Exercise Does Not Reduce the Risk of Local Muscle Injury," Dr. Shrier lists five reasons why stretching shouldn't be expected to work. Among them: stretching won't change eccentric muscle activity (when a muscle simultaneously contracts and lengthens, as in downhill running), which is believed to cause most injuries; stretching can produce damage at the skeletal level; and stretching appears to mask muscle pain, which could cause the exerciser to ignore this key pre-injury signal. He concludes: "The basic science and clinical evidence today suggests that stretching before exercise is more likely to cause injury than to prevent it."

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## Stretching continued from page 3.

This is certain to come as a shock to many runners. In a recent Runner's World Online Poll, 89 percent of respondents said they try to make stretching "a regular part" of their program. Stretching has worked for them, so why should they stop? "I was sidelined with an IT band injury, but my PT taught me some new stretches," one runner wrote. "Since then, I have not had any problems." Many others stretch simply because it feels good.

It's easy to understand why flexibility has fans. I want to be flexible--not rigid--in my life, especially in my thinking. Likewise, we all know that tall buildings and long bridges are built to be flexible. Their flexibility enhances their strength in the face of hurricanes and earthquakes. No doubt: Flexibility is good. Until you consider runners' relationship with "motion," which is another word for flexibility. Runners try to avoid too much motion. We wear orthotics to prevent overpronation. We wear knee straps to prevent too much lateral movement. We do crunches to build a rock-hard midsection. Flexibility sounds like a great idea, but has definite drawbacks for runners.

The best research on stretching and injury prevention has been done with military recruits. Military training has much in common with exercise, and the Army has a huge interest in keeping injuries to a minimum. In one study, titled "Physical Training and Exercise-Related Injuries," a U.S. Army research team found that trainees with the highest and lowest flexibility had the highest injury rates. They were, respectively, 2.2- and 2.5-times more likely to incur an injury than trainees with average flexibility. Apparently, when it comes to flexibility and injuries, don't try to be all that you can be. Settle for average.

Surprisingly, the best-known stretching-for-runners team in the United States, the father-son duo of Jim and Phil Wharton, agree with the medical research conclusions. "We don't even use the word 'stretching' anymore," the Whartons say. "It conjures up an image of static stretching--of holding still for too long, like the tension created by a tug of war. That can actually weaken the muscle-tendon connection."

The Whartons promote AI ("active, isolated") flexibility exercises. These exercises move the muscle and joint gently and progressively to the point of slight tension, then immediately release the tension, and then repeat 10 times. There's no static-stretching hold for 10 to 30 seconds. "This promotes healthy blood circulation and lubrication to the joint," say the Whartons, whose fans include Deena Kastor, Alan Webb, and Khalid Khannouchi.

Since older runners would seem to have much to gain from stretching, I call Ed Whitlock, who last fall became the first 70+ runner to go sub-3:00 in the marathon. But Whitlock is afraid of setting a bad example. You see, he doesn't stretch. "I get the greatest return on my time by piling on miles," he says. "I don't want to dump on stretching. We all need to find our own way. But you can do too much and get injured."

The CDC's Dr. Thacker agrees. "If the time you spend stretching," he says, "causes you to lose time from something else--more running, strength training, or stability exercises--then you might be better off spending the time on that something else."

Or take the middle road: stretch in the evening while you're watching TV. I like the Wharton approach, where you keep moving through your stretches--into them and out of them. That seems like a natural way to make you feel better. And it won't cut into your training time.