

Running Head: WHY RUN

Why Run

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When deciding to take on a new exercise regimen, many people feel

overwhelmed with the array of available choices. Although the realm of exercise consists of many different types of activities, few are as simple and easy to begin as running. Running is simple; no running coach is needed and required equipment is minimal. In an article titled “Best Burn for the Buck,” the author, Sara Max, states that running not only offers the most caloric-burn, it is also the most cost-efficient (Max, 2007). She states that when comparing costs of equipment necessary to participate in other exercise routines to the cost of a simple pair of running shoes, running trumps all other exercises’ “Burn for the Buck” (Max, 2007, p. 23). Simply put, running is an uncomplicated activity that can improve physical, psychological and social health.

The most obvious benefit of any exercise program, running included, is improvement of physical health. Running is great way to improve cardiovascular efficiency, decrease blood pressure, and control body weight (Karnazes, 2006). Since it is mostly an aerobic activity, running increases oxygen capacity and improves oxygen delivery. As a result of this increased cardiovascular function, more physical effort can be exerted before anaerobic system begins consuming glycogen and producing fatigue. Additionally, running at near VO₂max (the level of maximum oxygen consumption), has been shown to improve lactate thresholds. This means that the more one runs, the more one can exercise without pain-inducing lactic acid building-up in primary muscle groups (Impellizeri, et al., 2006). In addition, because running burns more calories per hour than nearly all other exercise activities, around 657 calories per mile, it can assist those seeking to control body weight (Max, 2007).

Not only does running improve physical health, it can improve psychological

health as well. Exercising releases endorphins—a hormone that reduces pain—causing what has been termed as a “runner’s high.” “Endorphins are powerful opioid compounds produced by the pituitary gland and hypothalamus during certain exercise, pain, consumption of spicy foods, and, get this, orgasm” (Karnazes, 2011, p. 26). This “high” reduces stress and gives the runner a sense of euphoria. Studies have shown that anxiety can be reduced by running. Additionally, it can decrease feelings of fatigue, tension, and aggression. Likewise, confidence and self-esteem can be positively affected when a runner achieves personal running-goals (Boecker, et al., 2008). Dean Karnazes, an ultra-marathon runner, writes that running helps him deal with the daily stresses of his work-life. He states that long-distance running helps him focus and organize his thoughts (Karnazes, 2006).

Lastly, running can be a great way to meet new people and develop a stronger social well-being. Organized running events, such as marathons, bring hundreds or thousands of people together. At these events, runners are gathered together at the starting line—each one about to begin an adventure. The groups of runners are packed tightly together making it inevitable that conversations start-up. It is easy for even beginning runners to feel a strong sense of belonging. Runners looking for a closer-knit group of partners can find solace in running clubs. Many clubs exist across the country and are always accepting new members. Runners are notorious for opening up to other runners in ways that welcome even the newest of athletes (Karnazes & Fitzgerald, 2008). Additionally, running outside with friends is a healthy activity that encourages extroverted behavior. Because almost anyone can do it, running can bring together

people of many different backgrounds. This can help people expand the size and diversity of their social network. On a larger scale, government agencies have seen the impact of large scale fitness events such as marathons and other running activities. These events can help social environments expand their awareness of how to live healthy lifestyles (Shipway & Holloway, 2010).

Although the benefits of running are many, they can be categorized into the following three areas: physical, psychological, and social. From increased cardiovascular performance to social-diversity, running is a great way to positively affect various areas of one's life. There are many different types of exercise routines; however, few are as simple to perform and still yield as many positive results. Running is an effective way to increase these areas of living; a simple activity yields tremendous results.

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