

Good News If You Hate Running: Here Are 5 Even Better Ways To Get Your Cardio

Prevention

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When I was training for my first—and only—marathon in 2004, I used to joke that it would be a miracle if I didn't throw my hand in the air and hail a cab when I hit the proverbial "wall" at mile 20. (It was New York City, after all.) While I can honestly say I loved running that race, I'll admit it was more because of the eight-person-deep swarm of spectators cheering me on than the running itself.

Don't get me wrong, I love the concept of running. After all, in this world of \$40-per-class spinning gyms and fancy yoga studios, lacing up your running shoes and hitting the open road is not only free, but it's also super convenient. Yet after I recently ran my first 5K race in about 6 years, my sore knees, burning calves, and aching lower back again reminded me of the chief downside of the sport: It's just plain tough on my body.



Plenty of research proves that I'm not just a running wimp. One study by researchers at the Moses Cone Family Medicine Center in North Carolina found that as many as 50% of runners get injured every year, with common injuries including shin splints, knee pain, Achilles tendinitis, and iliotibial band syndrome. (I was diagnosed with tendinitis in my knee after my NYC marathon adventure.)

Other research, published in the *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness*, found that the body produces higher amounts of the stress hormone cortisol and lower levels of testosterone during endurance running, which actually causes the body to burn muscle—pretty much the opposite of the muscle-building most of us aim for when we exercise. And for those who think running helps you live longer, think again. Recent research published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found that those who run more than 4 hours a week have the same risk of dying as those who are sedentary and hardly exercise at all.

Yes, there's also the pro-running research, including studies showing that running isn't as bad for our joints as most people believe and that moderate running (we're talking 10-minute miles or slower, for as little as 5 minutes a day) is actually associated with reduced risks of death from all causes. Yet many experts still agree that running can have more downsides than benefits for the vast majority of us. (Not a runner? Check out our [Fit in 10 program](#) to transform your body with 10-minute daily workouts—no running necessary.)

"Our modern lifestyles—sitting for the majority of our days, hunched toward a computer screen or smartphone—lead to excess tension and misalignment of our muscles, and when one part of the body is out of whack, the impact running produces can put pressure on areas that just aren't built to withstand it," says Chandler Stevens, a personal trainer in Cincinnati. That's why so many of us get injured when we run, he says, and why finding alternatives to running is key. Jessica Matthews, MS, a spokesperson for the American Council on Exercise, agrees, noting that there are plenty of cardio options that'll help you get the same cardiovascular workout and calorie burn, minus the threat of injury.

So, whether you've always despised running or you're starting to wonder if it's doing more harm than good, here are 5 ways to get a great workout without (literally) pounding the pavement:

1. Hit the elliptical.

“This is a great option for those who love running but want less stress on their joints,” says Matthews. Just be sure you’re working your upper body as much as your lower body, she says, which will strengthen your arms and increase your overall calorie burn. (Also avoid these [10 common mistakes people make on the elliptical.](#))



2. Hop on a bike.

Whether you dust off your old road or mountain bike, try a spin class, or simply log some miles on an upright or recumbent stationary bike at the gym, biking places less stress on your joints than other cardio equipment does, says Matthews, while still burning a substantial number of calories.



3. Try interval training.

You’ve read about it for a while now for good reason: Research shows that interval training—which involves short bursts of high-intensity exercise alternated with periods of rest—burns more fat and improves overall fitness more quickly than constant, moderate-intensity physical activity, such as running. The best part? You don’t need a personal trainer barking at you to pick up your pace in order to start working some interval training into your go-to routine. Simply grab a stopwatch (or make sure you’re within eyesight of a clock), and for every 1 or 2 minutes of moderately paced exercise you do on, say, the elliptical machine or stationary bike, do 1 minute of fast-paced exercise. Alternate from low to high intensity for 10 minutes to 20 minutes, says Matthews.

4. Find some stairs.

Sure, swapping the elevator for the stairs at your office is a good call—but to get the same kind of cardio workout that running provides, Matthews says you’ll need to put in some time on the stair climber at the gym. “When done properly, stair climbers can provide a challenging cardio workout as well as strengthen the lower-body muscles,” she says. Hint: Just be sure not to “cheat” by lifting yourself up on the handrails when using this machine; that’ll take the effort away from your legs, reducing the overall effects.



5. Keep running...in the pool.

Don’t want to give up your daily runs just yet? Move them to the pool, suggests John M. Martinez, MD, a sports medicine physician in San Diego. “Aqua jogging is a great cardiovascular exercise that takes away all the impact on your joints,” says Martinez. Or skip the running and do some laps. Swimming is a full-body workout with countless benefits, including training the body to breathe more efficiently and improving muscle strength and flexibility, while going easy on the joints and muscles. (Give these [19 pool exercises](#) a try.) “Swimming is a great way to work out vigorously without the same risk of injury you get with running,” says Martinez.

