HARTZ Physical Therapy

FUEL FOR YOUR RUN

A Monthly Running Newsletter
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Welcome to Fuel for Your Run! Each month, we'll break down a different running topic — including injury prevention, training, strength, fueling, running form, racing, and more.

My goal is simple: help you train healthier, smarter, and stronger.

This newsletter is for educational purposes only and does not replace individual medical advice.

Pain when running: what to do?

Picture this: a runner signed up for a fall marathon last spring and started a training plan three months ago, building their long run each week. This weekend, during a 22-mile run, their knee starts to feel sore around mile 14. They panic. Is all that training about to go to waste? Now every step becomes an analysis of that knee.

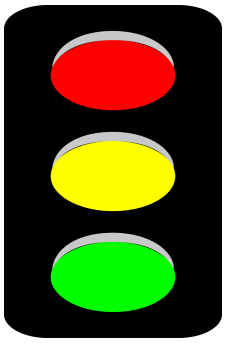
We've all been there. You feel a twinge, your mind starts racing, and you can't stop thinking about it. Should you stop? Push through? Will it get worse?

The answer depends on the runner and the situation. I'd respond differently to something I felt in the closing miles of a half marathon than during an off-season easy run. But in the moment, these five questions can help guide your decision:[1-2]

1. **How bad is the pain (0-10), and is it sharp or just tight/sore?**
2. **Does it change my running (limping, altered stride, slowing down)?**
3. **Does it get worse the longer I run, or ease up as I warm up?**
4. **Does it linger after I stop, into the rest of my day or the next morning?**
5. **Is there visible swelling, or a specific spot that hurts to press?**

I use a traffic light system to interpret the answers.

	Green light: good to go	Yellow light: proceed with caution	Red light: stop and shut it down
Pain level?	Tightness or soreness 0-2/10	A consistent, non-sharp nag of 3-6/10	Sharp, severe, or sudden pain >7/10
Running changes?	No change	No change in running mechanics	Limping, significant slowing, altered stride
During the run?	Improves with warm-up	Improves with warm-up	Pain that increases during the run
After the run?	Settles after the run	May linger a few hours	Pain that affects daily life or needing medication
Tenderness or soreness?	No swelling or painful spots	No swelling or painful spots	Visible swelling or point tenderness
What to do?	Keep training	Modify training for 1-2 weeks	Stop and seek medical attention



Red seems obvious, but many athletes feel pressure to prove their toughness by pushing through training or finishing a race. Those short-term "gains" aren't worth the long-term consequences. If you're in the red zone, seek medical attention quickly.

Yellow is trickier. Most runners here just need to modify training for a week or two and let things settle. That might mean reducing volume, intensity, frequency, duration, or vertical gain.[1-2] If you're in the yellow and unsure what to change, reach out, and I'd love to help.

Green is a normal training response. Tightness and soreness often follow hard sessions and are usually benign.[1-2]

So what should our runner who feels some knee pain at mile 14 do? If the discomfort eases and doesn't change their stride, they should continue, but if it increases as they go and/or changes their stride, they should stop, walk, and reassess over the next couple of days. If it continues to bother him over the coming weeks, get it checked out.

Key Takeaway: discomfort and tightness are a normal part of training; however, it needs to be monitored if it lingers. Sharp pain that changes your stride, impacts your daily life, and/or requires you to take medication means you need to stop training and seek medical attention.

🔥 HOT TAKE OF THE MONTH

Missing a session or even time off doesn't hurt your training as much as you think!

Missing a session is not going to hurt your fitness as much as trying to cram the session into later in the week and blunting recovery. Even if life gets busy and you have to reduce training, you can still maintain your fitness with 50% of your normal volume as long as you maintain the intensity in the sessions that you can get.[3] Don't stress missing a session. Simply pick up with the next one, and if you have a few busy weeks, maintain your intensity (quality sessions) to maintain your fitness.

🍎 MOVEMENT SNACK OF THE MONTH

Skipping

It's just marching with a little hop! Skipping is a great way to work on knee drive, posture, and power needed when running.

Try it: March in place • Add a little hop while marching • Keep your chest tall • Move your arms naturally • Start moving forward. Use it as a warm-up. Try 3-4 rounds of 10 yards before you run.

Got Any Running Questions?

Any questions or suggestions for future additions? Reach out at nesbenshade@hartzpt.com

Until next month, keep running!

References

1. Lacey A, Whyte E, O'Keeffe S, O'Connor S, Burke A, Moran K. The Running Injury Continuum: A qualitative examination of recreational runners' description and management of injury. *PLoS One*. 2023;18(10):e0292369. Published 2023 Oct 4. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0292369
2. Jin J. Running Injuries. JAMA. 2014;312(2):202. doi:10.1001/jama.2013.283011
3. Spiering BA, Mujika I, Sharp MA, Foulis SA. Maintaining Physical Performance: The Minimal Dose of Exercise Needed to Preserve Endurance and Strength Over Time. *J Strength Cond Res*. 2021;35(5):1449-1458. doi:10.1519/JSC.0000000000003964