Fall is the perfect time to enjoy outdoor running activities. The cool temperatures and the changing colors make for wonderful running conditions. It is a very popular time for running events, and this provides a competitive incentive to bring out the most of your athletic abilities. It is also a time when running injuries are common. Fortunately, the majority of injuries can be minimized or completely avoided by following some basic principles.

**TIPS TO PREVENT RUNNING INJURIES**

Create a running plan. Before starting a running routine, it is important to define your current fitness abilities and your long-term goals. Consulting with a trainer can be a helpful first step. Most running schedules avoid increasing mileage by more than 10% per week.

Choose the right clothes and shoes. The ideal running apparel should be lightweight, breathable, and wick moisture away from your skin. A hat can protect against the sun and cold. A good pair of running shoes typically has built-in arch supports. Not only do they enhance comfort, but they can be very helpful for people with conditions such as flat feet. Most running shoes should be replaced every 300 to 600 miles depending on training conditions and intensity.

Choose the right setting and conditions. A uniform and flat running surface can help minimize stress on the joints and muscles. It should ideally have some “give”, such as a cork track or a treadmill. The sudden introduction of hilly terrain can increase the risk of injury. It is generally advised to avoid running in weather that is above 90°F (especially if there is high humidity) or if the temperature is below freezing.

Stay safe. Reflective clothing or a light should be used for night-time running. If running with headphones, the volume should always be low enough to hear cars and other noises.

Warm-up and cool down. A warm-up prior to running should include activities such walking or light jumping activities. This should happen before any stretching is initiated. An appropriate cool down includes a transition from running, to light jogging, to walking activities. Stretching after running can also be helpful to reduce muscle tension the evening or day after running.

Stay hydrated. It is important to drink an extra 1 to 3 cups of water on days that you run. Depending on the intensity level, a sports drink is helpful if you are running for more than a ½ hour to one hour. These drinks replace electrolytes lost in sweat.

Participate in strength and cross-training. General and core strengthening exercises help to decrease the risk of overuse injuries. Introducing a sport such as swimming, biking, or tennis can facilitate muscle performance by preventing the acclimation of repetitive exercise.

Listen to your body. Possibly the most important tip to avoid a serious running injury is to stop running if you experience pain or functional problems. This concept is stressed by elite marathon and ultramarathon competitors, as well as by some of the top running coaches in Kenya. It is typically much easier to treat an early stage and recent problem, versus an advanced and chronic problem.

**TREATMENT OF COMMON RUNNING INJURIES**

Fortunately, most running injuries can be managed with treatments such as rest, ice, a compressive wrap, and elevation. In addition, limited amounts of stretching and massage, and medications like over-the-counter anti-inflammatories (such as ibuprofen and naproxen) can help with pain. When these measures fail to resolve the pain, it is important to follow-up with a health care provider.

Best wishes for a safe and successful running season from all of us at Elliot Orthopaedic Surgical Specialists!