

## Chapter 5 – Top 10 Mistakes of Young Female Runners (an excerpt from the book, *Fast Track* by Suzy Favor-Hamilton and Jose Antonio, Ph.D.)

### Top Ten Dos and Don'ts

1. Do educate yourself.
2. Do eat dairy and meat.
3. Do eat fat.
4. Do eat immediately after training or racing.
5. Don't eat like a POW.
6. Don't believe bagels are a health food.
7. Don't train for Western States 100 mile race.
8. Don't dwell on a 'bad' race.
9. Don't obsess over a certain number.
10. Don't run 'just to run.'

### *Do Educate Yourself*

Don't believe everything your friends tell you. There's a reason you have cross-country/track coaches as well as strength and conditioning coaches. Why? Because they know more about training than you! If your roommate, best friend, and fellow runner tells you that eating jelly beans is a health food, don't go out and buy a bagful and eat 'em all as you watch re-runs of *Real World*. And don't believe your fellow runner when she says that eating one meal a day is the key to her running success. We implore you to listen to your strength and conditioning coach, your track coach, your exercise physiology professor, and runners who have been around long enough to remember who the President of the United States was before Ronald Reagan. Runners who are successful into their late 20s and 30s know more about running than an 18 year old out of high school. Surround yourself with people who have more experience and know more about running than you. That's the long-term key to success. And most importantly, read as much as you can.

### *Do Eat Dairy and Meat*

Eat protein! Also, you need to get enough iron and calcium. All three of these items tend to be neglected by many runners. You need protein to help your muscles recover from a killer workout on the track or a long run designed to improve overall endurance. Calcium is needed for bone health and for fat loss. And iron is needed for normal oxygen-carrying function in your body.

Milk is an excellent source of protein. Why do you think babies need milk? It's great food that has a large number of "bioactive peptides." These peptides (or little proteins) could function to improve your overall health as well as provide the amino acids needed for runners. And you thought milk was only good when you ate mom's apple pie! Also, did you know the calcium in milk might help you lose fat? Yes, new research from the University of Tennessee finds that "*increasing dietary calcium results in significant reductions in adipose tissue mass in obese humans in the absence of caloric restriction and markedly accelerates the weight and body fat loss secondary to caloric restriction, whereas dairy products exert significantly greater effects. These data indicate an important role for dairy products in both the prevention and treatment of obesity.*"<sup>1</sup> What that means in plain English is this. The more calcium you consume, the more fat you lose even if you're not cutting back on calories.

Consume one or two servings of beef per week unless you're a vegetarian. Why? Because beef is a great source of protein, zinc, and iron. If you don't want to get the fat from beef, go for the leaner meats (Table 1.1).<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1.1 – Fat Content of Different Types of Beef**

70% lean, 30% fat (ground beef)
80% lean, 20% fat (ground chuck)
85% lean, 15% fat (ground round)
90% lean, 10% fat (ground sirloin)

*Do Eat Fat*

Fat is not bad for you. In fact, you need to eat fat in your daily diet. But you need to be smart about this (remember #1: Do Educate Yourself). There are bad fats. These are saturated fats and trans fats. Saturated fats are found mainly in meats. For instance, when you eat a steak, trim off the outside fat. And avoid eating foods that contain this on the label: “partially hydrogenated” oils. These are trans fats and they may be worse for you than saturated fat. Trans fats increases levels of the ‘bad’ cholesterol, LDL, in your blood. In some studies, it is worse for you than saturated fat. Soon however, the FDA will require food labels stating how much trans fats is in a food product.

Then there are good fats! These are the unsaturated varieties. Both polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are healthy. Olive oil, fish fat, fats from nuts (cashews, macadamia nuts, almonds, etc), and peanut fats are healthy. If you don’t like eating sushi, try to get at least a quarter-cup serving of healthy fats from nuts or olive oil (e.g., on salad dressing).

*Do Eat Immediately After Training or Competition*

Scientists have discovered that if you eat a proper ‘meal’ immediately after training, you’ll recover much more quickly than if you wait 2 hours. Yes, what a difference a couple hours makes! We know many of you aren’t exactly starving after a hard track workout. If you want to recover faster and feel better the next day, you need to consume a combination of carbohydrates and protein right after training. As a general rule, try to consume about 250 calories right after training. Make sure the amount of carbohydrate is roughly twice as much as protein. For example, if you’re a 120 lb runner, we’d suggest you get roughly 20 grams of protein, 40 grams of carbohydrate, and a touch of fat (e.g., 1 teaspoon of flax oil). This doesn’t mean you should eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Instead, we recommend you consume a protein shake right after training. (See Chapter 10 for more details).

*Don’t Eat Like a POW*

Undereating is probably the most common mistake made by female runners. How can you possibly feel normal when you’re running 40 miles a week but you eat fewer calories than your pet hamster? Granted, a hamster can run on that exercise wheel for hours on a diet of seeds and hamster chow. But you’re not a hamster. You need calories! It’s true that thinner, leaner runners tend to be the fastest runners. However, that doesn’t mean you’ll run necessarily better at 10% body fat versus 12% body fat. Each of you has a different build; some are naturally lean, others might have to work extra hard at it. On the other hand, some of you might actually gain muscle fairly easily. So don’t kill yourself trying to attain the body of some other runner when you realistically have to work with the stuff mom and dad provided you (i.e., your genetics). So eat, please.

*Don’t Believe Bagels are a Health Food*

Bagels are probably one of the worst foods you could eat. Gasp! You have got to be kidding. That’s right. And while we’re at it, throw pretzels in there as well.

Both of these 'foods' are popular among runners because they're low in fat. Using that logic, then you might as well open your mouth and pour table sugar down your throat. Table sugar has no fat. I guess that makes it a 'health food.'

Bagels are a high-glycemic, low-fiber, processed food that has few redeeming qualities. Just for comparison, let's look at a plain bagel with 2 tablespoons of jam of versus a McDonald's Quarter-Pounder sandwich.

<b>Table 1.2 – Let's Compare Bagels and a Quarter-Pounder</b>				
	Calories	Protein	Carbohydrate	Fat
Bagel with 2 tbsp jam	452	13 grams	97 grams	1 grams
Quarter- Pounder	420	23 grams	36 grams	21 grams

Note: Figures are rounded.  
Nutrient information was derived from the following websites:  
[http://www.whatsabagel.com/html/nutrition\\_facts/bagel\\_plain.html](http://www.whatsabagel.com/html/nutrition_facts/bagel_plain.html)  
<http://www.mcdonalds.com/countries/usa/food/nutrition/categories/nutrition/>

Not that a Quarter-Pounder qualifies as a 'health' food, but it looks more 'balanced' than a bagel with jam. The bottom line is this: don't eat a food, especially a high-carbohydrate food, because it's low in fat. It may be low in nutrients as well. High-glycemic items like bagels, white bread, white pasta, etc. should be limited. The only time you want to consume high-glycemic carbohydrate items is right after exercise. Also, if you're doing a long run (> 90 minutes), it might help to consume a high-glycemic sugar during the run. There are various gel packs that could meet this need.

#### *Don't Train for the Western States 100 mile race*

Imagine this. You start running from Squaw Valley California and end up in Auburn California 100 miles later (<http://www.ws100.com/>). That's the Western States 100 mile run. The winner of the 2003 race finished in 16:01:18 (that's over 16 hours). His average pace was a 9:37. The poor soul who finished last did it in 29:55:56 at a 17:58 pace. Imagine running for a day. Geez, it's hard enough studying for an exam for 4 hours, watching re-runs of *Friends* for 2 hours, much less 'running' for a day. Granted, a 17 minute per mile pace hardly qualifies as running. So what's the point we're making?

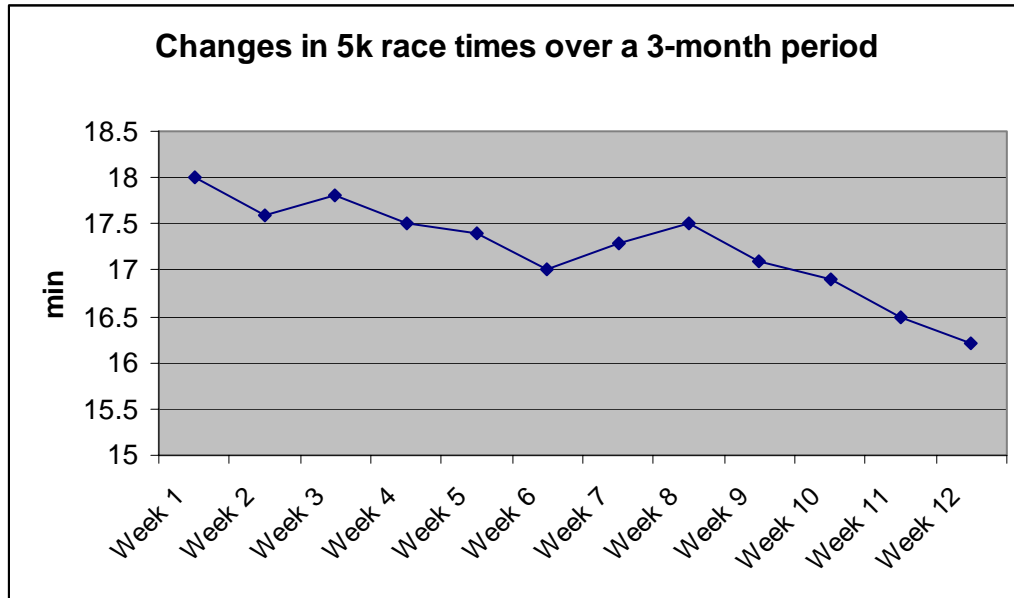
The point of this is to show that most of you eat too little and run far too much! Unless, you're training for a 100 mile race, then there's no need to put in more mileage for the sake of saying you did more miles. These so-called junk miles are just that, junk! You'll end up running like a junk car ready for demolition. Some scientists refer to this as being overtrained.

A good friend of ours described overtraining as the terrible trio of eating too little, exercising too much, and resting too little. If you mess up any of the three, you're setting yourself up for big trouble: chronic injuries, poor performance, insomnia, poor grades at school, and overall grumpiness. So before you decide to go out for a run, just to get in miles, don't! Your training and eating program should involve a systematic progression, not some haphazard, new-age method.

#### *Don't Dwell on a Bad Race*

So you had a bad race. Your time in the 5000 was 20 seconds slower than last week. Get over it. You need to look at your running progress as a jagged line that trend towards faster times. For instance, Figure 1.1 below shows a hypothetical progression of a runner's 5k race times over a 3-month period. It is expected that there will be weeks when your race time may actually get worse. But don't fret. It's the overall trend that's important. For instance, your week-12 time should definitely be faster than your week-1 time (assuming your healthy and injury-free). However, if you're not improving, it's time you sit down with your coach and re-evaluate your training program. We'd also suggest you consult with a sports nutritionist as well.

**Figure 1.1**



#### *Don't Obsess Over a Certain Number*

If you're someone who gets upset over your body weight, then don't weigh yourself. Obsessing over a 1 or 2 lb change in body weight would be like worrying about getting sand in your toes while vacationing in the Florida Keys. It happens! In fact, some women get so upset with a slight gain in body weight that they try to 'make up for it' by running more. Talk about the tail wagging the dog! The purpose of training is not for you to lose weight. Your focus should be on performance. Let your body weight take care of itself. If you're training smart and eating healthy, your body weight will reach its ideal level.

#### *Don't run 'just to run.'*

Junk the junk miles. Don't run because you're bored. Don't run just to say you did 50 miles this week. Your training should be a systematic progression, not a haphazard choice. Besides, on those days when you're doing junk miles, your body would be much better off resting. For instance, let's say your best friend and fellow cross-country runner asks you go out for an easy 6-miler on a beautiful Sunday morning in Vermont. Granted, it's a great way to view the foliage, but it's a terrible way to treat your body especially if this run wasn't planned. Here are better alternatives if you must exercise. Get on a bicycle and pedal leisurely through the countryside. Or go to the gym and do the recumbent bike, elliptical or stairclimber.

Each of these exercises has less impact on your joints and will give them a much needed rest. Also, they might relieve you of the routine of running.

Better yet, instead of exercising. Stay home and rest. Catch up on studying, a good book, or treat yourself to a movie.

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<sup>1</sup> Zemel MB. Role of dietary calcium and dairy products in modulating adiposity. *Lipids* 2003 38:139-46.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dispatch.com/news/food/food00/food0517/282614.html>