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# Is running good for you?

## Some say yes; others say no

By MAHLON BEACHY

It seems wherever you go in Eugene, you see runners. Everywhere, there are groups, couples and solitary individuals sweating and straining, risking their lives at every crosswalk and, in general, doing their best to pound their feet into shapeless stumps. They run in all types of weather, they come in all shapes and sizes and they take their running very seriously.

If you're new to the "running capital of the world," you may wonder at this activity, though running is certainly not an exclusive Eugene trend. Why do these people run? What benefits, if any, does it give them and is it something you should do? If so, what should you know about it?

There have been an endless list of benefits and problems attributed to running since it became a fad as part of the fitness craze of the 1970s. Everything from a longer life and lower blood pressure to protection from heart attacks was attributed to it. Conversely, everything from joint and muscle injuries to "runner's nipple" and infertility in women was raised against it.

With all these opposing claims, it becomes confusing whether you should run and, if so, why you should. Obviously, many people run because it is a great way to stay in shape or to lose weight. Others run because it improves their personal appearance.

Dr. Steven Roy, who operates the Sports Injuries and Running Clinic of Eugene, says that there are many benefits for those who enjoy the activity of running, and discounts many of the claims

against it.

"My feeling is that most people don't cause themselves permanent injury purely from running," Roy says. He feels the studies against running are not well enough controlled, and often unscientific. Thus, many of the claims are unsubstantiated or wholly invalid.

"But the newspapers worry about the lack of reliability and so when they find anything that's published, they assume it is gospel. A few years ago, there was a big thing about running causing heart attacks. But it's been shown that heart attacks happen most often sleeping. You have to be careful when interpreting reports."

Roy believes there are several undeniable benefits of running, other than fitness and appearance. First, even a modest running program will decrease the risk of a heart attack. Of less tangible but equally clear benefit is the stress release involved, the chance to release pent-up emotions in a healthy way.

"We see this in students a lot, as they're under tremendous pressure," Roy says. "If they can run 40 minutes to an hour a day, they often get relief from stress. For many, running is aimed at release more than it is toward physical fitness."

Another benefit, Roy claims, is an overall increased level of productivity. "Runners find they are able to be active for longer hours at higher levels of intensity."

Finally, there is a social benefit for those who like to run as a group as a social activity as well as to the individual who just wants to get out and run by himself, getting away from the pressures of life and meditating or enjoying the scenery.

Roy emphasizes these benefits over the fitness or nutrition aspects for a reason. "I disagree with those people who hate running, but do it because it's good for them or will make them look better. If the only reason for running is so you may live a few extra years in theory, you should use the time for something else. I think that at least half the benefit of running is mental. I don't think you should run just so you've appeased your conscience about having had an extra piece of cake at lunchtime, either."

Dolly Warner, trainer for the University track teams, agrees that running should only be done if it is enjoyable. "As long as they do some kind of aerobic activity, whether it be biking, skiing, swimming, or running, they'll get the benefits. In fact, some of these involve a lot less pounding, and thus less joint degenerative changes, than running."

But whatever the activity, the amount of aerobic work done must be the same as would be attained in running, to attain the same benefits.

For the person who wishes to begin a running program, both Roy and Warner recommend starting slowly and gradually working up. The great majority of injuries stem from doing too much too fast, or overtraining. Roy recommends a six-week walking program for adults who haven't run in years.

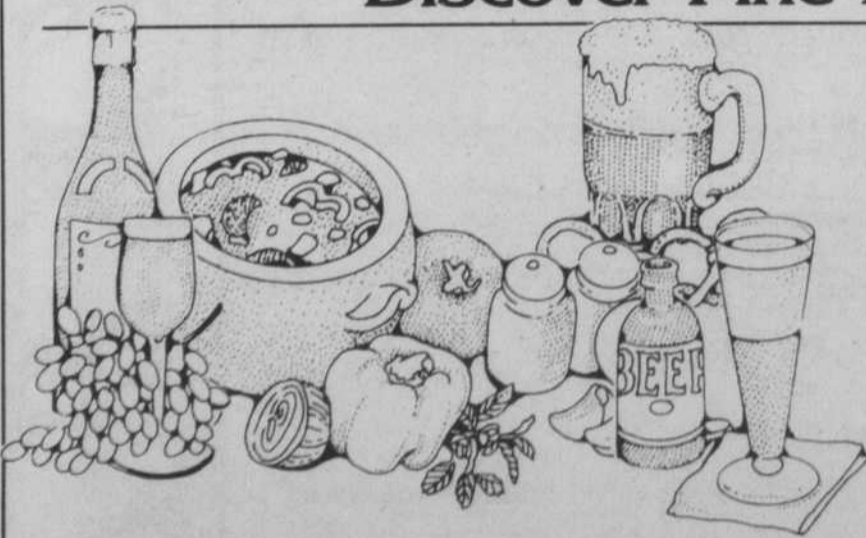
"Then you gradually bring running into the walking program, and slowly increase the time you're running. When you get to fifteen minutes at a time, you can go to just running by itself."

Warner recommends starting with a mile a day and gradually week by week mov-

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