

Benita's Important Areas

It's the little things that count!

Written by Benita Johnson

Do you think your running has reached a plateau? Could you add a little something extra in your routine to improve your times that little bit more? Whether you're an elite athlete aspiring to make the Commonwealth Games team or a fun runner competing around the country in road/track races – we all want to improve our times. It is that feeling of satisfaction and excitement that we get when we run a personal best which we all strive for as runners.

I run my best when happy and relaxed. Below are the things in my life I believe to be vital for me to run my best and for general enjoyment of my life and running. I'm not saying that you should follow this word for word, certainly everyone responds to different things – just have a look and see what you could possibly add into your daily routine.

Importance of Family and Friends

These people come first in my life before anything else. Whether you get that job promotion, win the Olympics or break down injured, these people will always be there to support you through your life journey despite what happens along the way. I view running as just a 'part' of my



These people come first

life (certainly a very important part mind you) but not my whole life.

Relaxation – Time Out

This is an absolute essential. Most people forget to do this. We usually just focus on getting the training done as the priority – I believe relaxation activities are just as important. It allows our body and mind to have a bit of a break and 'time-out'. It can be anything from going out to your favorite coffee shop, having a nice cappuccino and reading a trashy magazine to meditation, listening to music, going to the movies or taking a nice bubble bath.

Whatever you like, just take the time out to do it at least once a week.

Coach or Mentor

Even if you are just a 'fun' runner (and don't think you need a coach figure), I suggest you find someone who will take an interest in your running and talk to them about your training – what sessions you plan to do in the week, what races you're training for and focusing on. It is always nice to get an opinion of an interested 'running' outsider. There are certainly plenty around – if you're not sure where to find one, join a running club, there'll be

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lots of coaches/mentors there. If you're of an elite standard, make sure you're happy with the coach you have and believe 110% in the training set and competitions planned. As soon as you start doubting what you're doing, you should confront your coach about your concerns. If nothing gets resolved, you should bite the bullet and move on. Make sure you choose your coach carefully – every coach has a different coaching 'style'. Different 'styles' suit different people so be sure to take this into account. Remember that this person will guide you and your running and keep in mind that you only have a limited time to get the best out of yourself – you don't want to end up thinking, what if? Having belief and confidence in the program set is essential. At times in my career, I have had to change coaches when I felt the time was right - I am happy with the choices I have made in the past and have now found the best coach for me and will be guided by him until I retire.

Goals

Make sure you set yourself weekly or monthly goals so you have something to work towards as you train each day. I always set goals for myself as I like to have a direction and focus as to where my training is headed. I feel a real sense of achievement when I achieve each goal set along the way. I usually have a major championship as my big goal for a certain training period then add in smaller goals along the way. Probably the best thing for any fun runner to do is work out a race you'd like to do and plan your training up until that race. Once it is over, find another race and plan around that and so on.

Training Group

I have been fortunate enough to benefit from having a great training group around me throughout my career. We travel the world together and get a great sense of enjoyment and motivation from seeing others in our group run well. Whilst I had a rather 'ordinary' performance at the World Champs this year in Helsinki – I was there in the stadium when one of my training partners, Craig, won the bronze medal. I was so excited I jumped off the stands (ran straight past the bouncer-like security guards) and onto the track to give



Massage is great for recovery and injury prevention.

him a hug as he did his medallist victory lap jog. Our training group had a nice night of celebrations; his performance has inspired us all for the year ahead. While you don't need to always run with a group (I do enjoy running on my own from time to time), it does certainly make the sessions go quicker and gets you up out of bed for a run on days when it's cold and raining. There are many avenues you can pursue to find a group to train with – probably the best thing to do is to join a running club. There will be people of all ages and fitness levels there and they will welcome you with open arms. Otherwise, have a look around your workplace - I bet there are many 'lunchtime' runners who'd

be happy for you to join them out on the trails. I live in Melbourne and see many, many groups of runners meeting up each day for a few laps of the 'tan'. Plenty of people love running and enjoy the 'group' environment for training.

Recovery

I have freezing cold ice-baths after every hard session, three physio/massage sessions a week, a sleep most afternoons, early nights, sports drinks etc, all to assist me with my recovery between hard training sessions. I don't expect everyone to engage in all these sorts of activities but certainly try to get a bit of a massage here or there and really rest up when you can (maybe



Take time to relax and recover from your training, it's good for both your mind and body.

Advice from one of our best...

structure your hard training days for the weekends or try to finish work early one day a week so you can get adequate recovery on these days following a hard session). If you have to drive straight to work following a session, make sure you pack something to eat and a recovery drink in the car to replenish your fuel stores straight away. Try to have early nights during the week as sleep is one of the most important recovery tools – can't be replaced by anything.

Strength and Conditioning

Since injuries are very common in our sport, we must work at strengthening our body in order to minimize the chances of problems occurring. Each year, I get a physio screening to detect any muscle weaknesses and imbalances. I then devise exercises accordingly in order to get my body as strong as possible for the training ahead. (For a first timer, it might be useful to consult a strength and conditioning coach for a few sessions to get started on a core strengthening program). I follow a daily program of exercises, pilates and stretching - really enjoy doing it all. I try to change around the exercises I do from time to time to keep up plenty of variety. You don't need to join a gym or spend loads of money. All the stuff I use, I have in my home. Just get some dumbbells, an exercise mat and you're away. The key is to do your strengthening exercises on a regular basis and you'll notice results.

Balance

To compete at the highest level, I need to focus most of my energies into my sport. However I've always maintained a balanced life as much as possible. Never fall into the trap of putting all your energy into your running. You will be left with nothing in your life if things don't work out. As an example, despite traveling the world, I managed to complete two University degrees - Bach Human Movement/ Sec Education plus a Post Grad Sports Nutrition. The flexibility of universities these days was great and part-time, correspondence courses really suited my lifestyle. Therefore when I got injured or had down times (injuries happen to everyone at some stage in their careers), I had something else to focus on while my body was healing – instead of moping

around all day bored and frustrated. Another advantage was that when I started going to University, I met people outside the 'athlete' loop. It is certainly healthy to have other friends. While I was at the AIS, I didn't live on campus there, but chose to live at the University of Canberra residences for a year, as I wanted to meet other non-athletes while doing my study and training too. I need other things in my life to think about besides running and stimulate my mind as an outlet away from the track. I can still train very hard and focus intently for sessions but I don't think about my running day in and day out.

Diet and Nutrition

Eating a balanced diet low in fat and full of fresh fruits/vegies, wholegrain cereals/breads/pasta, lean meat and plenty of water will do wonders for your health regardless of whether or not you're an elite athlete. I believe following a good quality diet is an investment in my running and will fuel my body ready for each session and foster adequate recovery in between sessions. Make sure you start off the day with a good breakfast as you'll need the energy to last through the day (particularly if you have a 9am-5pm job in amongst all the training). I would recommend cereal, oats (porridge or bircher muesli), yogurt, fruit, grain toast, orange juice etc. Lunch is vital to keep your energy levels up for the afternoon session ahead. Meat and salad

sandwiches are good choices. Snack a bit during the day on things like fruit, low fat yogurt, muffins, cereal bars etc. Make sure you sit down to a good dinner each night containing lots of different coloured vegies/salad (remember the more colours in your vegies or salad, the more nutrients you're getting) and some lean meat all combined with some sort of carbohydrate source (i.e. wholemeal bread or pasta). I always like something sweet after dinner – try some yogurt with seeds, fruit bread, low fat ice-cream. Make sure your Iron intake is adequate – every time our foot hits the pavement out on a run, we lose hundreds of red blood cells (which is what makes up our iron stores) so therefore distance runners are prone to becoming anemic without regularly replacing these cells. Eating red meat three times per week will be apt to combat this. This is the best source available. Also, don't deprive yourself of all things nice. Go out to your favorite café once a week and order a nice dessert (my favorite is sticky date and pear pudding). You can really look forward to these treats – you've earned them with all the hard training done during the week. I hope this helps in some way. In the next issue I will have an in depth look into nutrition for sports performance and also give you a few of my favorite recipes to try. We have a great summer of athletics coming up so get out there and enjoy it.

R4YL



You wouldn't put the wrong fuel into a high performance car, so why do it to yourself!