

POOL RUNNING: THE ULTIMATE REHAB TOOL

Recovering and taking time off from an athletic injury can not only be frustrating but also detrimental to an athlete's fitness level. Throughout my athletic career, I have used pool running as both a rehabilitation tool while I was injured and as a cross training tool when I needed to add some variety to my training.

As a form of cross training, pool running is the most biomechanically specific form of cross training for the runner or running athlete. This means that pool running more closely simulates actual running than other forms of exercise. This also means that you should gain better fitness benefits from this form of exercise than from other forms.

Certain injuries such as stress fractures, tendonitis and muscle tears will require that you refrain from running while rehabilitating an injury. You will be able to participate in pool running, allowing you to maintain and even enhance fitness during the time in which the injury heals.

Aqua running or pool running consists of simulated running in the deep end of a pool aided by a floatation device (vest or belt) that maintains the head above water. The form of running in the water is patterned as closely as possible after the form used on land. No contact is made with the bottom of the pool, thus eliminating impact. The elimination of weight bearing makes this an ideal method for rehabilitating or conditioning, particularly for those of you with foot, ankle, or knee injuries for which running on land is not possible.

For the runner (or any athlete whose sport requires running), aqua running therefore represents a biomechanically specific means of conditioning during a rehabilitation program or when supplementing regular training. The following guidelines will assist you in maintaining proper form during your pool workout:

Keep your abs tight to support your back.

Avoid leaning forward from the waist.

Raise your knees up to about hip height, then push down and slightly backwards with your foot

Bend your arms in a 90-degree angle and swing them from the shoulder.

Allow your fingers to come just below the surface of the water in front of you, and to your hips at your side in the backward swing.

Expect a lower stride cadence. Remember water is more resistant than air and your pace will decrease accordingly.