

SETBACKS DON'T SIT WELL WITH RUNNERS

By DON SIKORSKI
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One of the advantages of being a runner is the feeling of physical fitness. Runners seem to be able to move from place to place more efficiently than non-runners. Runners don't tire easily. Runners usually handle discomfort better and complain about it less than most other people. And runners, or for that matter anyone who exercises on a consistent basis, usually know right away when something is not quite right with their physical health.

A few weeks ago, my wife, who routinely gets out the door for a 5 or 6 mile run, complained of chest pain. She passed on the opportunity to go for her evening run, a somewhat unusual decision given the fact that the kids had been raising the household stress levels all day long. The next morning, the same pain was still there. And by day three, the family was in the Emergency Room looking for an answer and something strong to combat the pain. The initial diagnosis was Lyme disease, an infection delivered by a tick bite that causes fatigue, joint pain, and arthritic symptoms. A day later, blood tests results determined something more severe; a disease called babesiosis. Babesiosis, similar to Lyme disease, is spread by Northern deer ticks carrying a parasite called "babesia" microti, which attacks red blood cells in the body. Muscle and joint pain and fatigue are usually followed by headaches, high fever, or worse, and require steady doses of antibiotics to cure. In general, these are not very good circumstances for a runner, or anyone for that matter, to endure. Runners aren't quite themselves when they aren't running. It was going to be a difficult road ahead.

In general, runners who train on a routine basis don't like not being able to run. Moods and attitudes change. The ambitious are reduced to helplessness, and months of training benefits appear to be lost forever. Just ask the spouse of any runner who can't run what that time period is like. Fortunately, it takes a runner's mentality to understand another's. Yet while my level of fitness seemed to actually be increasing as a result of charging up and down the staircase at top speed three dozen times per day (offset, of course, by the four or five hours of sleep per evening), my wife felt as if her body was deteriorating to nothing. Much like anyone who's ever suffered through something like Lyme disease or even the flu, it is difficult to comprehend how a strong body can become so weakened. Is it really true that someone who can run for an hour and feel fine one day can struggle just to get their body out of bed the next?

The antibiotics have done their job and the human body has a remarkable ability to recover. I anticipate my wife will be back running very soon (probably by the time this article goes to press), and although it will be a struggle, a return to normalcy won't be far away. Playing psychologist and delivering the "one easy mile of jogging today will eventually become five miles of comfortable running tomorrow" speech will be challenging and met with frustrated glares. But any athletic person understands that patience and determination in the short-term will lead to a greater level of fitness in the long run. Check yourself for ticks this summer, keep the insect repellent replenished, and get checked out if you don't feel well. And if you're a runner who is suffering from a setback, be patient and positive that you will soon return to that feeling of physical fitness that runners are entitled to.

Racing Roundup

Most of the region's best road race events have someone who understands runners be involved. Having someone who knows how to promote an event doesn't hurt either. Jim Gothreau and the Deary Road Race Committee combine their efforts to put on one of the top road races in the area next month. Its one race you won't want to miss. The 18th Annual Deary Memorial 5 Mile Road Race will take place on Saturday, August 11th in Putnam. Registration opens at 7:45am for the certified 5 Mile Road Race, with the starting gun going off at 9:05am from the J.D. Cooper's Restaurant on Park Road. Race proceeds benefit Cancer Screening and Treatments at Day Kimball Hospital in Putnam. Contact Tori Bates at (860) 928-7141 (tbates@daykimball.org) or check out the race's web site at www.daykimball.org/philanthropy/events/deary_race.shtml for more information. The Deary race, along-standing tradition in Northeastern Connecticut, is organized by veteran runners and offers plenty of amenities, including accurate mile splits, plenty of prizes, professional timing courtesy of SNERRO, and an eventful post-race gathering inside J.D. Cooper's following the race. Make every effort to get out and participant in this terrific event for a very worthwhile cause.....The New York City Half Marathon has announced that two-time Olympic gold medalist Haile Gebrselassie of Ethiopia will compete in New York for the very first time. Gebrselassie, 34, has announced that he will run in the August 5th event in what will be just his third race on U.S. soil. He has never lost a race at the half marathon distance in eight starts. He earned Olympic gold medals at 10,000 meters at Atlanta in 1996 and again at Sydney in 2000. Gebrselassie also owns three major marathon victories, four world 10K titles, and numerous world records.

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