



The Best Way to Manage a Running Injury

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When you're a runner, an injury may seem devastating. A sprain, pulled muscle or stress fracture can feel like the end of the world. But a [running injury](#) doesn't have to mean ditching your running shoes. The important thing is to not push through the pain.

The first step toward [recovering from an injury](#) is acknowledging the injury and adjusting accordingly. A small nagging pain in your heel can turn into something much more serious if you ignore it for weeks and continue logging your usual mileage. So, you may be better off resting for a few days to see if it resolves, or seeking professional help to assess it.

If you're an injured runner — whether it's a small setback or a serious sideline — there are some steps you can take to start the recovery process right.

1 DON'T PANIC

First of all, [statistically speaking, most runners end up with injuries](#) at some point in their careers, ranging from minor ones to season-enders. It's often a matter of 'when' rather than 'if.' Before you start worrying about skipping a few weeks of training, pause and recognize this as something that happens to most runners and isn't a permanent state of being. Let yourself feel sad, but put the injury in perspective.

2 CONSULT AN EXPERT

Your doctor, coach or physical therapist may have told you running was off the table, but there are numerous [alternate options to help maintain your fitness](#). Depending on the injury, you may still be able to [bike](#), [swim](#), [deep-water run](#), use an [elliptical machine](#) or [walk](#) for cardio. You may be able to do some [strength training](#) with a focus on the core and upper body. You may even be able to do gentle yoga. Make sure you get the go-ahead from the expert you're working with before jumping in: You may not think a Warrior 2 in yoga is going to exacerbate your knee injury, but your physical therapist knows better.

3 FOCUS ON PROTEIN

“Your body's needs are actually similar at least for the first few weeks to when you are running,” says Kylee Van Horn, a registered dietitian at FlyNutrition. That means focusing on your [protein intake](#) — Van Horn recommends between 1.5–2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight daily. If you're not running or doing any type of training for a while, she recommends lowering your complex carbohydrate intake slightly but keeping protein on the higher side. “More importantly, focus on [spreading out protein intake throughout the day](#) to promote the highest rates of muscle protein synthesis,” she adds. If you're vegetarian or vegan, make sure you're getting a full range of amino acids (especially leucine) to improve muscle protein synthesis and ultimately, speed your recovery process.

4 TRAIN YOUR BRAIN



Your body may not be cooperating with you, but this can be a great opportunity to spend some focused time on [mental work](#). You may be able to finally start that daily [meditation practice](#) now that your training time is curtailed, and while you can't run, you can work on race day visualizations. Check out books like "[The Brave Athlete](#)," by Simon Marshall, PhD, and Lesley Paterson for worksheets, mental exercises, and the science of how our brains can help improve our running even when our body is out of commission.

5 FIGHT INFLAMMATION WITH FOOD

Time away from training means you may finally find the time and energy to hone your eating habits. Since your energy needs will be a bit lower and you'll have more time, it may be easier to make space for [meal planning](#), [eating more whole foods](#), and [skipping highly-processed options](#). "I would focus on cleaning up your diet and adding inflammation-balancing foods," says Van Horn. "Make sure you're getting a lot of high [omega-3 foods](#) like [chia](#) and flaxseeds, walnuts and fish. For [high-antioxidant foods](#), aim for a rainbow of fruits and veggies and for anti-inflammatory spices that help you avoid highly processed sauces and condiments, try things like [turmeric](#), cinnamon and ginger."

6 MAKE A RECOVERY PLAN

"[Recovery is your superpower](#)," says sports psychologist Kristen Keim. "You want to not just get back to running, you want to also be able to have a generally healthy life — and sometimes that means taking a longer break than you want to. Having a plan for how to manage your recovery and comeback can help keep you focused on what matters." Once you've seen a doctor or physical therapist and gotten an estimate on your healing time, you can start to plan ahead — you may not want to book tickets to a far-flung race, in case your healing time is a bit more extended than you anticipated, but you can start planning your training calendar.

7 DON'T TRY TO LOSE WEIGHT IMMEDIATELY

If you're thinking this injury presents the perfect chance to start restricting calories to lose weight, think again. "I actually caution against [weight-loss efforts](#) until about 3–4 weeks after you start recovering because what I find is that people end up restricting so much that they set themselves up to have no nutritional substrates to heal the injury," says Van Horn. "It's a fine line between losing weight and trying to heal injury. Once you reach that 3–4-week point, you could try some gradual weight loss, but I would get guidance from a professional or it could prolong your injury."