

Managing The New Normal

By Coach Rick Muhr

The self-isolation that has been forced upon us resulting from the global health crisis is wrought with challenge and opportunity. The uncertainty of how long this will last and being deprived of our normal routine of life, particularly as it relates to our fitness routine, is one of the greatest challenges. Our ability to respond to this unprecedented situation also provides one of the greatest opportunities to improve who we are and how we live.

This is an opportunity to assess the areas in our fitness life; where we excel and identify the areas providing the greatest opportunity to improve.

Living in the spirit of continuous improvement requires a constant state of self-assessment. You can easily develop a structure and methodology around how you conduct your workouts, eliminating the guesswork around attaining your fitness goals.

We tend to be creatures of habit, repeating the same workouts based on the same structure, volume and intensity. Disrupting your normal movement patterns and workout structure is a quick path to improved fitness and overall health; physical, mental, and spiritual.

Taking the time to conduct an honest assessment of every aspect of your fitness regiment has the potential to yield the greatest results. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 (10 being perfect) in the areas where many athletes struggle:

- Nutrition
- Hydration
- Sleep
- Post-Workout Recovery
- Stress Management
- Attitude
- Variety of Workouts
- Strength and Conditioning
- Functional Movement Improvement
- Realistic Goal Setting
- Managing Setback, Disappointment, and Injury

This is an extremely dynamic proposition. The goal is to be a consistent 7 in each of these areas and not drop below a 4 in any of them. If you do, being able to avoid the quagmire of hopelessness and despair, and returning to a Level 7 as quickly as possible is critical to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and attaining your goal of improved fitness.

Being unable to visit your fitness facility and being deprived of your equipment, group fitness classes, and network of support can completely disrupt your routine and cause you to feel lost and unmotivated. But there are so many other opportunities to not only maintain your fitness, but to improve it.

I have been a running coach for 24 years and have trained more than 10,000 runners, mostly for the Boston Marathon. I have lost count of how many people have said to me, upon learning that I am a running coach, that they literally hate running.

I have also had countless personal trainers proudly proclaim that they don't do cardio. I have been blessed to convert many of them to runners who moved beyond the dread of getting their run over, to the joyful pursuit of being a lifelong runner.

Running can be the key component of achieving a higher level of overall fitness.

Theoretically, running is a very simple act. However, it has been complicated by an abundance of confusing and contradictory information.

Running is an art form and requires practice to achieve perfection. Here is a simple checklist to improve running form and efficiency:

- Run with your chin up
- Keep your shoulders back and down
- Keep your hands soft (imagine holding fluttering butterflies) and close to your torso, without crossing your center line
- Keep your jaw relaxed
- Develop and sustain a pattern of relaxed and rhythmic breathing
- Land with your feet close to your center of gravity (close to your body), preferably on your mid-foot
- Land quickly and quietly to minimize your contact time with the running surface to increase your cadence
- Try to achieve a cadence of between 165-180+SPM (Steps Per Minute)

Runners tend to start too quickly. The first mile of every run should be the slowest (60-90 seconds slower than you expect to average for the remaining miles). This allows you to establish a rhythm of efficiency and your heart to pump oxygen-rich blood to your major running muscles. You should run at a pace that allows you to comfortably carry on a conversation.

Taking regular walk breaks (1 minute of walking for every 9 minutes of running), similar to taking a quick break between reps of a strength and conditioning workout, allows you to maintain your form and minimize injury, throughout each run.

Athletes tend to neglect the post-workout recovery routine. This is as important as the actual workout. This is when the real work of recovering from the just completed workout and preparing for the next workout begins. The post-workout recovery regimen you develop is an investment that will pay dividends for years to come.

Allocate at least 20 minutes to thoroughly stretch, roll, and elevate your legs. Properly refueling and hydrating within 30 minutes of every workout helps to repair microscopic tears in the muscles and fuel your muscles for the next workout.

A well-timed and much needed rest day is as important as a great workout to your overall fitness. Monitoring your RHR (resting heart rate) every morning is a good habit to develop. It reveals how well rested or stressed your body is and is a great guideline for determining the appropriate level of intensity and volume for your workout each day.

Your determination, dedication, and discipline will determine the magnitude of success you realize during these challenging times. It's a great opportunity to incorporate new movement patterns and activities to improve your functional movement and overall fitness.

This is also an opportunity to emerge with a greater sense of gratitude and appreciation for things you may have taken for granted. The *New Normal* will be fueled by an increased resolve to become the best version of yourself!