

Why you should consider Trail Running.

Increased Balance

Trails are often uneven and covered in obstacles and hazards, such as rocks, tree roots, mud, and even the occasional wildlife. Believe me, I've tripped over all of them many times. In order to prevent stepping on or even falling over such hazards, a far greater level of bodily awareness is required than typically needed when running on paved roads. The greater bodily awareness combined with the constant shifting of your body weight to avoid such obstacles while running will help increase your overall balance and stability.

Stronger Legs and Core

As mentioned above, trail running requires a greater sense of balance. To maintain that balance, more muscle groups are activated throughout your run to compensate for the constant shifting of your body weight, including smaller stabilizing muscles in your legs, ankles, feet, and even your core. Further, the ever changing terrain, constant shifting, and often rolling hills that accompany trails, require you to engage different muscle groups more frequently than you would simply running on flat roads.

Further, the softer terrain of trails acts as added resistance to your legs. Because the trails have less rebound than pavement, the quadriceps, hip flexors and gluteus muscles are forced to engage more than they do on a pavement.

Less Impact

Trail surfaces are typically softer than that of pavement or concrete. As a result, less force is being applied to your body from the running surface, specifically your legs, resulting in lower impact and lower stress. Varying the surfaces that you run on throughout your training may help prevent injuries that occur due to overuse and impact.

Ankle Strength & Stability

Oh if I had a dollar for every road running client that came to me with a history of ankle injuries! A wrong step in a pothole or a leap off of the curb that landed them in an air cast, nursing an ankle sprain. My first suggestion? Bosu training. Second? Hit the trails! (Assuming the injury has healed, of course.) As mentioned above, the varying terrain combined with numerous obstacles forces greater proprioception and muscle engagement, specifically stabilizing muscles, such as those in the foot and ankle. You can't strengthen what you don't work, and often times the monotonous, one direction movement of road running leaves these stabilizing muscles and ligaments underworked.

Hill Training in Disguise

Chances are no matter where you are, if you head to the trails, you are going to find hills. For years I ran in flat-as-a-pancake Coastal Carolina, with nary a hill to be found, short of a man-made bridge or overpass. Then some local triathletes went ahead and blazed a trail in an undeveloped area of Myrtle Beach. Lo and behold, there were inclines! Sure, they weren't long, but they were steep enough to be considered a climb, and cause my heart rate to climb as well.

Point being, hill repeats on a long paved road can be boring and monotonous. Hills on a trail run will typically vary in grade (steepness) and length, thus constantly challenging your legs and lungs with variety.

Avoid Traffic

Sometimes I feel like I'm playing a dangerous game of "chicken" with vehicles. While running on roads I'm so paranoid and on the lookout for cell phone distracted drivers that I can hardly enjoy my run. On the secluded trails you will be able to avoid stoplights, busy intersections, distracted drivers, and other hazards that come with traffic. While there are still plenty of safety tips to keep in mind while on the trail, you are far less likely to encounter man made obstacles and dangers.

Enjoy the Quiet

Leave your headphones at home and enjoy the peace and quiet out on the trail. Many people find the sounds of nature, such as birds chirping or the running water of a stream, to be very relaxing. Further, here are a number of health benefits associated with spending time outdoors, including increased happiness, improved concentration, and even improved healing. Appreciate the break from the stress and commotion of everyday life, and even of the crowds and traffic that can accompany road running. For lack of better social media contrived terms: UNPLUG.

Avoid Monotony

You knew I was going to say this. Trail running is akin to being a kid on a playground. There are puddles to jump in, streams to jump over, logs to climb, and trees to duck under. Forget the same old view of flat pavement and cookie cutter suburban homes. Trails are a constant adventure.