

Having a Support Network

Written by Richard Ferguson Ph.D
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It is often said that running is an individual sport and to a great extent running is a very personal and individual sport. However, even though an individual trains and races, there are usually many others behind the scenes that lend a helping hand. Without others to help support, running performance would certainly be compromised and even enjoyment of the sport of running would be compromised as well. As an old African proverb says, "to go fast, go alone; to go far, go together". Yes, it's true, even though running is individual, there is really a team behind the individual.

Support can come in many different forms. Maybe the the most important is emotional support. All runners need people in their lives that stand behind them emotionally in both good and challenging times. Running is a demanding activity, from both a physical and mental perspective. Sometimes the demands can seem overwhelming. Running places physical stress on the body. No question, running can make you tired, especially if you're running a lot of miles. Trying to fit in training, work, family etc. can leave you feeling worn out, both physically and mentally. During times of high fatigue having someone to encourage you and even help out with a few chores can mean everything. It might be a significant other, friend or even training partner, but a few words of encouragement can mean the world when you're stressed from the demands of life.

Of course, running has its ups and downs. There are times of joy and exhilaration, but there are also times of disappointment and frustration. When things are going good with running, like having new personal bests, age group wins or personal goals being met, there is nothing like being able to share these moments with those who support you through thick and thin. A big part of the the fun of reaching a running goal is to be able to share the experience with others. Those close to you, whether friends, family or other runners, can share in your joy and celebration of a good performance.

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With the ups of running there will also be some downs. Enviably there will be a bad race, low periods of motivation and dreaded injuries. During these low periods a strong support network is invaluable. Even if it's just someone to talk to about your frustration or disappointment, those close to you can help lift your spirits, get you motivated again and even add some humor about your situation. Things are easy when running is going well, but when it isn't, you need others in your corner to help you see things rationally, lift you up and get you back on track to feeling the joy you once did in your running.

Not just family, friends and other runners form a running support network. Coaches, Athletic Trainers, Therapists, Nutritionists and even Sport Psychologists are a big part of any running support network. Some runners have a regular coach to help them plan their training, while others may have informal "advisors" that serve the same purpose. It doesn't matter if you have a coach or just an advisor, both can help you plan out a physiologically sound training program and also be a very objective source of know and experience in your training. A coach can also be a good listener in those times of challenge.

Medically related professionals can also be a big part of a running support network. Athletic Trainers can help you prevent and treat some running injuries. Their preventative exercise programs can identify weaknesses and help you strengthen weak movement patterns or joints. In the unfortunate event an injury does occur. Athletic Trainers and Physical Therapists and help you rehabilitate the injury and get back to running sooner than trying to do guess work rehabilitation yourself. Even a regular massage by a professional can help you recover faster and feel better.

All runners need energy to train and race, so understanding nutrition is a must for running health and performance. If you have concerns about your diet or are simply looking to eat healthier, consult with a nutritionist. Be sure to look for a nutritionist that is Registered Dietician. There is so much false nutritional information and claims floating around that you have to be very careful about your source of nutrition knowledge. Be careful about things on the Internet and in popular magazines. Many nutritional claims are simply false and have no scientific evidence behind them. Nancy Clark and her article each month in Running Journal is a great source of reputable nutrition information.

A Sport Psychologist can also be a valuable member of your support team. If you're having difficulty with anxiety, negative thinking or even sleeping, a Sport Psychologist can help you identify the source of your concerns and even offer suggestions on how to improve things like concentration, emotional arousal, goal setting and self-talk. The word psychology often has negative connotations, but a Sport Psychologist is there to help improve the mental aspects of

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your running. Seeing a Sport Psychologist does not mean you have any problem, they are there to make you better and get more enjoyment from running.

So when you see a runner out training or in race they may appear to be alone. However, behind that solitary runner stands a strong support network.

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