

NON-INJURY OF THE MONTH: POST MARATHON STRESS SYNDROME

CONGRATULATIONS! You've been planning and training for this marathon (half marathon, 10K) for months. Every weekend you've gotten up early for your long run, planned your life around track and getting in the miles, and you've adjusted your diet to get the best results possible for this race. You ran well (if your event hasn't come yet, you're visualizing this), you're wearing your medal, and you've accomplished your goal. It's over...

I'd like to offer you some personal thoughts on post marathon stress syndrome and also some education on the condition of your hard-working muscles and how best to treat them for this non-injury to stay a non-injury.

When I trained for my first marathon, I ate-drank-and-slept marathon. I read my Runners World cover to cover. When I met any marathoner, especially one who had run MY marathon, I encouraged him to talk endlessly about the event. Sound familiar? A month before MY VT City Marathon, several of those experienced marathoners began asking me what I had planned for after my marathon. "A massage!" I answered. "Actually," my friend Paul said, "I was thinking a little further out than that." Most Fast Tracks members are very busy people. I'm sure you're looking forward to sleeping in on a Saturday, maybe even after 7am. You're planning to spend more family time, prepare for the holidays. If you don't have something after your marathon to focus on or look forward to, this is the time to start thinking about upcoming activities you enjoy. Post marathon stress syndrome is all about the physical and emotional let down after the long build-up. It's a good idea to continue the camaraderie of those Saturday runs, or substitute another enjoyable activity like biking or hiking. Maybe you could focus on a future race. I've been told that your best 10K time comes 6 weeks after your marathon, that gives your muscles time to recover while your endurance is still strong.

What about running after the marathon? I like to go for a short jog the next day to move some blood into those muscles I worked so hard. Blood brings nourishment and fresh oxygen and also circulates out the cellular waste. Gentle movement of the joints alleviates the stiffness and prepares the tissue for healing. Many runners like to take time off after the marathon; I've heard anyway from a few days to a month. The main object is to keep moving to bring in fresh blood. A rule of thumb is to take off one day for each mile you raced before you begin training again. Almost four weeks might not be necessary before you visit the track again, but be aware that you risk injury if you push hard too soon after your race.

Anatomically, the effort of hard, long running on your muscles creates micro-tears in the muscle fibers. Often swelling occurs at overworked joints. Ibuprofen will help reduce swelling, heat will increase swelling. As tempting as that hot tub looks, ice is the better choice for a day or two. Because of the micro-tearing, be very careful of stretching if you're not warmed up. A gentle jog or a hot shower will warm the muscle allowing you to stretch. I recommend holding the stretch for no more than 2 seconds, working the joint through its range of motion, then stretch again. Repeat until you feel a good comfortable stretch. Static stretching with compromised muscle fiber will encourage re-tearing; you don't want that!

Enjoy the proud glow from your accomplishment. Plan a fun activity for some time after your race. Schedule a well-deserved massage! Congratulations.

Stay on the roads.

Bobbi Kisebach, licensed massage therapist and 14-time marathoner

My training as a therapeutic massage therapist includes ongoing study in anatomy and physiology, pathology and clinical practice.

Please send me feedback on this series. Do you want more info than I offered? Do you want more case history? Less? Do you have an injury you're curious about? Let me know at BobbiVT2PA@aol.com