

## Vic's Fit Tip September 2008

This series of articles is designed to help the beginning to intermediate runners enjoy their chosen activity, add some variety, improve their fitness and avoid injury. Many runners have heard of cross-training, but just want to run. That's fine. There is nothing better than to get out the runners on a beautiful day and hit the roads for a couple of miles, or even a couple of hours! However, once you have tried a few races and become hooked on that bug, you may want to try to improve your speed. What can you do to improve your speed? Are there any exercises you should do that would help? I asked Vic about plyometrics recently and here is what he had to say.

Runners are at a higher than average risk for repetitive-strain type injuries of the knees, upper and lower legs. Thus it is important to build strength as we take on speed workouts. I look at my clients' individually to assess their musculature, and you should expect the same from any fitness trainer or coach you are working with. Only on an individual basis, can I build a fitness program that will work best for you, but meanwhile, here are four of the most common recommended exercises to help you build speed and strength.

I call the first exercise Standing Cable Rotations. For this you need a cable machine which you can find at any gym. Stand with your knees slightly bent and with your feet shoulder width apart with the cable and pulley at chest height. You should be about a meter away from the pulley and facing the machine. Rotate to the left 180 deg about the spine, then return and then rotate right for a full 180 deg. Do 3 sets of 6 reps each.

The Standing Cable Rotations engage the core: your abs, glutes, hips and obliques. A stronger core is vital to maintain your form during faster running. Do these fast going out and do a smooth return.

The next exercise is the dumbbell shoulder raise from bent position. Stand holding a pair of dumbbells down at your sides and take 1 long stride forward, not a lunge but a little longer than a walking step. For balance, your feet should be shoulder width apart, and your knees slightly bent. Bend forward at the waist until the dumbbells touch the ground. Raise body and arms together in a smooth motion until the bells are up over your head, then slowly back down to repeat. Again do 3 sets of 6 reps each.

The dumbbell shoulder raise from bent position benefits runners, but also triathletes or any performance-driven athletes. Notice that it works the core, but also the upper body.

I like to recommend Kickups for runners. For this exercise you use a cable device and ankle strap on one ankle. Stand with your back to the machine and allow the leg to come back to a slight stretch and keep the hips straight. You can hold a bar or support to maintain your spine in a straight position. The supporting leg stays slightly bent. Kick up the leg as high as you can forward. Notice that this simulates a forward running stride and strengthens the running specific muscles. Do 3 sets of 6 reps on each leg.

I'll choose the Kickbacks for our final exercise this month because it is a natural complement to the Kickups. Use a cable again, but this time face the other direction, toward the machine and angle the body more forward to get full range from hips, glutes, and hams to dig into the start of the stride. The resistance comes when you kick backward, away from the machine. Notice these engage the supporting leg as well as the resistance leg. This aligns all musculature through the core and hips, strengthening not only the hip and leg being moved, but also the stabilizing leg that holds the body. This is exactly what happens when we run because we run with each leg opposing. Do 3sets of 6 reps for each leg.

Here is a quick note about what weight to use. It is always tempting to look at what other people are doing in the gym and let's face it, no one wants to be the person to drop the weights down a bunch of plates and look like a weakling. In the gym, the rule is you respect the fact that the person is there doing a workout, regard less of the intensity. The vast majority of gym users really don't pay much attention to what you do in your workout. So feel free to raise the weight or lower the weight to suit you. This is actually crucial for every workout you do. James tends to use very light weights and then build up from set to set, but on a given day, the weight used may be adjusted depending on how you feel that day. Use weight that is light enough to allow you to concentrate on the form. We really want to stress that last point. Your posture and form throughout the exercises are what provides you with the gains you are looking for. Form and posture are crucially important. Doing the exercise wrong with loads of weight will not only waste your time, but could also cause serious injury. This is a case of working smarter, not harder.

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