



Road Runners Club of America

Growing the Running Community Since 1958



News & Articles

Advice for RRCA Members, Running Coaches, and Club Leaders

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Runners are optimistic by nature, but it's hard to super optimistic in the face of the current public health crisis of coronavirus and COVID-19. As an athlete, you may be feeling a little down, a bit stressed, and a lot unmotivated.

As a coach, you may be uncertain about what workouts to recommend for your athletes.

As a running community leader, you may be uncertain about how to manage your community.

Indeed, the runners in our group are asking all sorts of questions about training. Is running with other dangerous? Will running workouts compromise my ability to fight off the coronavirus? If races are cancelled, how am I going to stay motivated to train?

Let's look at some strategies for getting through this. We'll concentrate on public health, community leadership, financial issues, personal health, training advice, and motivation.

1) Public Health

First and foremost, please draw on expert medical advice from the CDC and from your state and county's public health agencies. The CDC website provides resources, data, and advice for specific populations. See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>. At this writing, we're in a national state of emergency. As of March 15, the CDC has recommended all gatherings of 50 or more be cancelled until further notice.

When running alone or training in groups, please continue to take all precautions and please be a good health steward. Assuming that you will follow the overarching CDC advice and drawing on public health advisories, RRCA recommends some basic do's and don'ts:

- Don't show up if you are feeling ill or have flu-like symptoms.
- Don't share fluids. Carry your own fluids to avoid contact with others on course.
- Don't share towels, food, gels, or any other item that runners normally share freely.
- Do wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after using the port-a-john.
- Do not spit or "nose rocket" your nose in public – bring along tissues or a small towel or a good old-fashioned hanky if you need to get rid of some snot during the race.
- Do practice social distancing - ensure appropriate spacing between runners; the current recommendation is at least six feet of separation.
- Do avoid close-group selfies.

If you're running indoors at a public facility such as an indoor track, a treadmill studio, or in a gym setting:

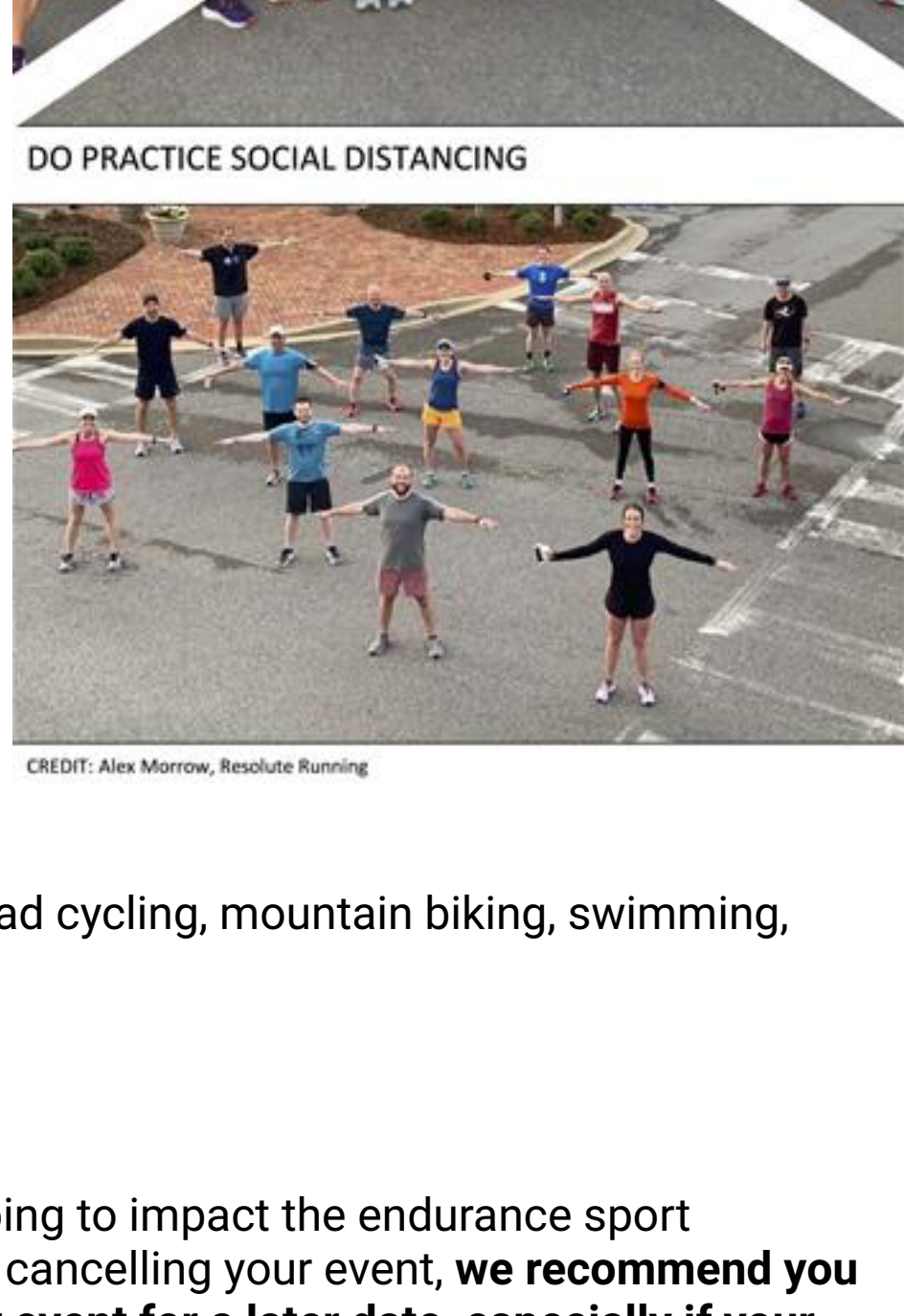
- Don't go to the gym if you are feeling ill.
- Don't wipe your eyes, nose, or mouth while running. (It should go without saying that you should not spit or nose rocket indoors.)
- Do thoroughly wipe down the handrails and monitor before you use the treadmill.
- Do thoroughly wipe down the handrails and monitor after you finish your workout.
- Do create space for yourself by trying to use a treadmill at least 6' from other treadmills being used
- Do wash your own hands when you're done.

NOTE: All of these suggestions apply to ALL standard gym equipment, including elliptical machines, stair-stepping machines, rowing machines, and the like.

2) Community Leadership and Coaching

Some running communities have cancelled all group runs, while others are continuing to hold small group social workouts. Regardless of what you personally want, be sure to check the CDC material and local health advisories so that you understand the overall conditions affecting your athlete.

- Do not pressure your athletes to run, either in a group or alone. People need to make their own choices about joining a small group run during these uncertain times.
- Do communicate with your athletes – if you coach groups, be sure to share with them your group protocols that follow local health advisories.
- If you coach individuals, be sure to reach out to each athlete and discuss their individual situation.
- Do support your athletes as they navigate their personal obligations.
- Do consider teaming up with others in your local running and endurance community to form a cohesive community-based plan.
- Do practice social distancing - ensure six feet of separation between runners if you host small group runs.
- Consider checking with the community leaders in road cycling, mountain biking, swimming, outdoor boot camps, and others.



3) Financial Issues and Event Cancellation

A hard truth is that the current public health crisis is going to impact the endurance sport community in negative ways. If you are thinking about cancelling your event, **we recommend you err on the side of caution and cancel or postpone your event for a later date, especially if your event is between now and June.** Many events are moving to virtual options. There are a variety of resources available for hosting virtual events. [RunSignUp](#), [FitRankings](#) and others offer virtual event platforms. If you elect to move to a virtual option, **DO NOT** hold a packet pick-up where people can come to collect shirts and medals during the next 30-days. This defeats the purpose of limiting interaction with people. Inform participants that a plan will be devised for distribution of shirts/medals as soon as it is safer to congregate.

Keep in mind as races are cancelling, it impacts everyone from the local organizer to the race participant to the local barricade company to the charity partners and so on. In sum, all of us in the running community will be affected, so here are some quick strategies for managing this:

- For event directors, communicate, communicate, communicate, with health officials, participants, vendors, charity partners, and more.
- For event directors, be mindful of contract language, now is a good time to review all agreements and check with your local experts.
- Check with your online registration platform for the status on what is commonly called a "holdback" to ensure that you can manage your cash flow.
- Make sure you balance your cash flow needs with legal and ethical commitments.
- If you are producing a race or a group event, decide if you want to postpone, cancel, or move to virtual. As you make this decision, outline a plan for all of the operational, financial, and ethical implications.
- Determine your refund plan and communicate clearly with your clients and participants.
- For runners, it is important to be kind to event organizers:
 - Remember, everyone is in a tough position.
 - Respect the no refund policy if that is what you agreed to during registration.
 - You love the sport, so take a long-term view of your role in ensuring the financial survival of your community-owned events.
 - DO NOT harm your race of choice by doing charge backs or demanding a refund if the race has a no refund policy. This hurts the long-term survival of an event you hope to run one day.
 - Keep in mind local events are just like small businesses in your community, your support will be critical to their survival.

4) Personal Health

Keep moving. There is compelling evidence that moderate exercise keeps you healthy. The academic journal *Frontiers in Immunology* published a study in April 2018 titled, "Debunking the Myth of Exercise-Induced Immune Suppression: Redefining the Impact of Exercise on Immunological Health Across the Lifespan."

According to the authors, John P. Campbell and James E. Turner, "evidence from epidemiological studies shows that leading a physically active lifestyle reduces the incidence of communicable (e.g., bacterial and viral infections) and non-communicable diseases (e.g., cancer), implying that immune competency is enhanced by regular exercise bouts."

This is good news for runners – in particular, for older runners. Campbell and Turner address the aging athlete and say that "exercise should be encouraged, particularly for older adults who are at greatest risk of infections and who may obtain the greatest exercise-induced benefits to immune competency."

Campbell and Turner end their article with these words: "leading an active lifestyle is likely to be beneficial, rather than detrimental, to immune function . . ."

While following all the guidelines by the CDC and local authorities, if you can get outside for a run, that's great. If you're worried about exercising near others, try getting out early in the morning or at dusk during standard dinner time.

But if you can't or don't want to leave your home, there are still easy ways to exercise:

- Do body-weight exercises for muscle strength
- Do stretch/yoga for flexibility and mobility
- Do core workouts for stability
- Do modified cardiorespiratory workouts such as walking up and down flights of stairs
- Do set up a cross-fit style exercise circuit in your home, using small furniture or those old boxes of mementos as free weights or step up.

All you're trying to do is get your heart rate up and have a bit of fun, so be creative and enjoy the pleasure of moving.

(True story: we once watched a middle-aged man do a whole fitness routine on a California beach using nothing but an empty green garbage can and the low concrete wall alongside the walking path.)

Go Back to Base. If races are cancelled, this is a great time to cycle into a phase of Base Training. Easy conversational pace running has proven mental health and proven cardiorespiratory benefit, so perhaps spend this time doing easy running at a low heart rate.

Depending on fitness, a base program of 1-2 runs of 25-40 minutes, 1-2 runs of an hour or so, and a longer run of 90-120 minutes will get you in excellent aerobic shape. (More running for those who run more and less for those who run less . . .)

Add in a 10-20 minute protocol of standard body-weight strength work and any of the standard flexibility/mobility exercises. A few months of this gentle running and you'll be in excellent shape.

Sprinkle in Some Effort. On the other hand, the good news is that you can also continue with high intensity training. As Dr. Jeff Messer, an exercise physiologist and 2017 US Girls High School Coach of the Year writes in an email, "Two (2) such vigorous sessions per week, for example, interspersed with multiple recovery sessions might be highly conducive to both a progressive enhancement of aerobic fitness and a corresponding enhancement of immunocompetency."

Thus you may feel comfortable adding in 20 minutes of Lactate Threshold Tempo Run or 1-3 miles total of Track Tuesday-style vigorous sessions.

Dr. Messer writes that this sort of training, "presupposes, of course, that an individual has no physician-imposed limitations to aerobic exercise / training and no substantial or potentially limiting health issues (such as a prior myocardial infarction, for instance)."

In sum, Dr. Messer indicates that consistent mild-to-moderate intensity interspersed with periodic vigorous intensity bouts "can collectively yield improved immunological health."

Remember in contrast to training for peak performance, the goal in this phase is to be moderate. In this public health crisis, you want to provide time for rest and recovery so that you are not feeling lethargic.

Run-Specific Cross Training. We love activities that mimic the running motion and increase our ability to bring in and process oxygen. Due to many of the community restrictions, this is a great time to include run-specific cross training activities in a training regiment, such as walking, hiking, elliptical, elliptigo, stair-stepper, and bike riding. We would like to include swimming, but this may not be an option due to closures of community pools.

Eat Well. Be mindful of your diet and continue to eat healthy food. It is easy to stockpile processed foods (crackers, chips, cereals, canned soups, and so forth), but you can also stockpile healthier foods, whether frozen, in a jar, or in a can.

Frozen fruits, peas, broccoli, brussel sprouts will add variety and nutrients, while canned beets, carrots, and other root foods will add texture and color to your meals. Tofu, nuts, and nut-butters can offer protein and healthy fats.

In times of stress, people tend to binge eat. Understand your own body, be mindful of your intake and understand that stress is normal . . . allow yourself the gift of comforting yourself in a healthy manner.

5) Motivation

Just because your next race got cancelled doesn't mean that your fitness got cancelled! You're still in shape – it's just a question of how you can use that fitness. Here are some possibilities – and remember, please always follow national and local health advisories.

Get outside. Running in the open air and the scenery will do wonders for your spirit. According to a 2019 study in *Mental Health and Prevention*, "Numerous studies found green exercise to have positive health effects, in particular, green exercise was found to reduce anxiety and stress, and to improve mood, self-esteem, attention, concentration and physical health."

Create a calm space to exercise. In the 2019 *Mental Health and Prevention* study, "Optimizing Mental Health Benefits of Exercise" (Klepeski, Koch, Hewell, Shempp, and Muller), the authors conclude that "in order to reduce stress levels by engaging in exercise, it might not be crucial to engage in green exercise but to engage in exercise in an (indoor or outdoor) environment which is being perceived as calming." As a coach, communicate with your athletes to find what is calming for them – for some it could be their neighborhood in the early morning dawn while for others it could be a treadmill with Netflix.

Organize a personal track meet. If you're in shape and not displaying any cold or flu symptoms, head to your local track and set up a time and see what you're able to do for the classic mile distance. Give yourself props for leg speed.

Pick a course that simulates your goal race and go run fast. Consider the standard negative split workout – run the first portion at a reasonable pace, then shift gears and run the rest of the route with intensity.

Pretend you're an Olympian. Olympic athletes take the long view – and you can too. You've built up your fitness, now cycle down and build it up again.

If resources permit, consider purchasing a membership in a company like Peloton or Mirror that provides virtual fitness classes. (You will want to be careful of your training in this environment, as it is easy to get caught up in the excitement and do more than your body can handle.)

In Closing

We wish all of you the very best as you navigate this public health crisis. If you have any questions about managing this situation with your running community, we at the RRCA are happy to be a resource. Feel free to contact us, and we can provide additional RRCA resources.

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