6 reasons why runners should do yoga

24 May 2013, by [Kyrin Hall](http://www.iamexpat.nl/community/contributors/KyrinHall)

Many sports, such as cycling and running, have very repetitive movements, thereby developing certain muscle groups while ignoring others. Over time, this can lead to overuse injuries due to imbalances in the muscles and joints.

Yoga becomes the sport enthusiast or competitive athlete’s ally because it works the body through all ranges of motion activating little-used muscles that support primary movers.

As a yoga practitioner and 5-time marathon runner, I find combining standing on the mat with pounding the pavement an effective training strategy for improved performance and injury prevention.

1. **Injury prevention:**

Running is a high impact activity, and our quads and hamstrings can get very tight both immediately after a run and long term if you're a frequent runner. Continually stressing tight muscles can lead to injury. Combining running with a regular yoga practice is an excellent strategy for [easing the tension of tight muscles](http://www.myyogaonline.com/videos/yoga/gumby-legs), improving muscle length. Yoga will complement the strength and power developed through running, and will help maintain mobility and stability within the joints. This will all help to support running and other activities.

1. **Master Correct Breathing**:

Yoga connects breath and movement. This technique optimizes a runner’s performance. Deep diaphragmatic breathing is emphasized with every movement in yoga. Slow, deep, consistent and rhythmic breathing slows the heart rate and reduces feelings of tension.

**3. Increased flexibility & Range of motion:**

Yoga incorporates movements that work the muscles and joints around their axis, allowing the muscles to lengthen.

A lack of flexibility especially in the hip flexors and hamstrings prevents adequate range of motion. The more tension around a joint, the more energy is required to facilitate movement and this can result in early fatigue and the potential for injury.

**4. Corrects postural alignment:**

Musculoskeletal imbalances can occur because many sports and habits [how we sleep, carry a bag, stand] have specific movements that dominate one side of the body. Yoga can be beneficial in reducing joint loading and imbalances.

Improving your balance and coordination with yoga leads to better technique and form. Better technique and form = better performance.

5. **Improve core strength:**

The slow, focused and controlled movements of the asanas require a strong core for correct execution.

As a full body, full range of motion, training method yoga strengthens supportive and under-used muscles creating a more balanced and optimally functioning body.

**6. Release stress:**

Forward bends and long exhalations stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system by sending a message to the Vagus nerve to calm the fight-or-flight response.

Yoga postures release tension around the body’s major stress points: neck, shoulders, lower back, hips...