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SNEEZY DOES IT

WHEN A BAD COLD STOPPED ONLINE EDITOR RHALOU ALLERHAND IN HER RUNNING TRACKS, WAS THE ANSWER REALLY JUST TO SLOW DOWN?

Inclement weather, demanding spouses, sneaky hangovers and lead-like legs can all put a spanner in a runner's routine. But if you're a determined runner, a healthy dose of willpower and a little bloody mindedness can usually overcome these obstacles. But no matter how fit you are or how well you train, runners have one impediment that can't be beaten – we all live in fear of injury.

Fear of injury is the mainstay of the die-hard runner's existence. No matter how well you prepare yourself against it, once it hits, injury must be endured. As all experienced runners will know, running through the pain more often than not prolongs the agony and makes things a whole lot worse. As a runner, you're putting your health in the hands of the road, and are therefore more susceptible to the aches and pains associated with high-impact exercise. So as runners, we spend our days training and safeguarding ourselves against

harm, in the hope that our limbs continue to work.

COLD CASE

But serious injury aside (which thank heavens I have so far managed to avoid), there's one more sneaky predator that threatens the humble runner which, when you really want to run, can feel just as debilitating as a missing limb. I'm talking about the common cold. If you live in this country and have contact with other human beings, then it's highly likely at least a couple of times a year you're going to be stricken with a stinking cold or a dose of flu.

So what does a runner do when faced with illness? I was recently struck down with a particularly nasty cold and as well as feeling bunged up, sore headed and miserable, I was burdened with the extra guilt of not being able to run. The fact is, we're usually stricken with illness when our immune systems are running low, so despite all of our instincts telling us to man-up and run through it, the reason we get colds and flu is because our bodies are telling us to take a break!

GIVING IN

The general consensus seems to be, if your symptoms are above the neck (such as a runny nose or a headache), then it's OK to partake in moderate exercise, but if it's in your chest or you have aching limbs, you should abstain until you're fully recovered. Flu, however, is a more serious business, so if you're suffering from a high temperature or the sweats, exercise should be avoided for at least a week.

I tried to run a few miles, but typically this prolonged my cold. By trying to fight my obvious need to slow down, I'd only made things worse. So, after fighting an inner battle and having a few words with myself, I finally gave in to the virus and took myself off the running circuit for a week.

I was terrified I'd drastically lose fitness and be back at square one, huffing my way around the park in a walk-run circle of misery. But surprisingly, although it still took me a couple of days to get back up to speed, I didn't lose all of my fitness overnight and before long I was back stronger than ever! So, the moral of the story is, if you feel like crap, wallow in it. More often than not it's your body's way of saying slow the hell down for a day or two. You may even be surprised at the positive effects a little break will have on your running! 🍷

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TO RUN OR NOT TO RUN...

WHEN YOU HAVE A COLD, OR FEEL ONE COMING ON, SHOULD YOU STOP RUNNING?

Shona Wilkinson, head nutritionist at The Nutri Centre (www.nutricentre.com), says: 'This is really something you have to decide for yourself, based on your symptoms. If you have a chesty cold, which is causing you to cough and restricts your breathing in any way, it's best to avoid running – you will find running difficult and it could exacerbate the problem. If you have muscle aches or a temperature, avoid running; if you feel sore, exercising when your muscles are already compromised can lead to an injury; if you have a temperature, running can cause it to rise even higher; and if you feel dizzy in any way (even slightly dizzy), don't run – you are asking for an accident to happen! If, however, you just feel as if you have a bit of a head cold (runny nose, stuffiness and sneezing), running may still be an option. Just take it easy and perhaps run for a shorter distance or run slightly slower. Some people find that running actually clears their head, but make sure you are being sensible about your distance and pace.'