**New to Cross Country? No Problem!**

**There is a place for everyone on the cross country team**, whether you are new to running or gearing up to place at the State Championship. This plan is for runners new to cross country, or those who have not been running at all for weeks. Included below is a 1) **a running schedule** and 2) **injury prevention exercises** to keep you healthy. Use these to get you ready for the season, especially if you cannot make it to our voluntary summer conditioning sessions.

**RUNNING SCHEDULE**

The best training for running is… running! This plan will help you get there. Again, it is for those who are new to cross country or have not been running for weeks. (For those with experience and those already with some recent running, see the “Return to Run” link on the website.)

Your potential for the season relies largely on what you do over the summer. No matter when you start, the key is to **build your training gradually**, so your body has time to adapt to your running without breaking down with an injury. **There are no “short cuts,”** no matter how much talent or speed you have! If you start in late August, you may begin to reach your potential at the end of the season. But start earlier, and you will maximize your potential because you’ll have more time to get faster.

This schedule outlines a six week plan to help new runners have a head start before our first official practice. **For 2023, this covers the six weeks leading up to our first practice (i.e. 7/10- 8/20).**

Some notes:

* As always, you should be cleared by a doctor before starting any exercise program. The physical exam required for IHS sports participation serves this purpose.
* This plan is intentionally flexible. With an overview for the week, rather than a daily script, you can shape your exercise around summer activities and vacations. Talk to the coaches if you have questions.
* Do not be too rigid with your training. You do not need to be perfect to be good. Any running is better than nothing (unless you are injured, of course).
* Consistency is important for fitness. Try to avoid *large* gaps of multiple days without exercise.
* Rest is important for recovery. Try to include *small* gaps of 1-2 days where you not exercising. Spread your weekly mileage over multiple days. Rest days can include walks, which will further prepare you for the season.
* Listen to your body. Minor aches and soreness often accompany new exercise and resolve in a few days. But if you have sharp or strong pain, cannot run without limping, or feel pain building week-to-week, talk to a healthcare provider and your coach to make adjustments. **Injuries are never a test of how tough you are** (whether you are willing to push through pain); instead, they test how disciplined you are (whether you are willing to get the help you need).
* If you start later (i.e. less than 6 six weeks prior to the first practice), do NOT try to “catch up” or “skip ahead.” Instead, start with week 1, even though you won’t get as far into the program before formal practice begins. Again, there are no “short cuts” to building fitness. If you try to rush your training, you invite injury.
* Effort for running should be gentle and easy. Another term for this is “conversational,” meaning it should be light enough that you could hold a conversation with someone while running because your breathing isn’t too strained.
* As always, if you have questions or concerns, reach out to your coaches. We’re here to help. We want you to have your best season, regardless of how fast you run!

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| **Week** | **Total miles for the WEEK** | **Run-to-Walk Ratio** | **Schedule** |
| 1 | 6 | Alternate 1 minute of running with 1 minute of walking | Alternate rest days with run days |
| 2 | 8 | Alternate 2 minutes of running with 1 minute of walking | Alternate rest days with run days |
| 3 | 10 | Try to phase out walking | Alternate rest days with run days |
| 4 | 12 | Running | 4-5 days running, resting on others |
| 5 | 14 | Running | 4-5 days running, resting on others |
| 6 | 16 | Running | 4-5 days running, resting on others |

**INJURY PREVENTION EXERCISES**

A lot of running injuries can be prevented with simple exercises that reinforce the muscles most needed for running. Add these to your summer routine to keep you healthy this fall.

Guidelines:

* Maintaining good form is more important than higher counts. If you you’re too tired to do them correctly, you’ve already challenged your muscles and they will respond.
* Completing these 2-3 days per week will help. Doing them daily will be even better, but don’t let perfect be the enemy of good. It’s not “all or nothing”!
* These do NOT need to be done all at once, or in any specific order. Many runners do best when they fold them into their existing daily routine, using pockets of unused time (such as waiting for the microwave, during commercials when watching TV, etc.). If you can’t fit them in daily, consider doing half of them on one day, then the other half the next day, then repeat.
* Listen to your body and do not push through them if painful.

Injury Prevention Exercises:

**Penguin or Funny Walks:** Lower leg and foot conditioning. Walk forward and backward about 15ft or can be done standing in one place. Repeat 4 times covering 4 different positions: Toes pointed **out** on tiptoes, toes pointed **out** on heels, toes pointed **in** on tiptoes, toes pointed **in** on heels.

**Heel Raise and Lower:** Similar to funny walks but standing in one place. Lift heels to stand on tiptoes, hold for 3-4sec then slowly lower. 2 sets of 8-10 reps.

**Monster Walks**: Feet hip width apart. Squat like going to sit in chair. Walk forward heel toe for 20 steps. Go backwards toe to heel for 20 steps. Hands on hips or pretend you are carrying a very large, heavy ball in front of you

**Crab Walks:** Similar to Monster Walks but take small steps to one side for about 20 steps. Reverse direction. Hands on hips.

**Lateral Leg Lifts (standing):** Stand on one leg lift other leg out to the side. 10 reps then hold up for 10 more seconds at the end of the last rep. 2 sets for each leg.

**Clocks:** Stand on left leg and extend right leg touching hours of a “clock” on the ground in an arc (e.g. 12, 1, 3, 5, 6). Then repeat on other side: stand on right leg and extend left leg to touch hours 12, 10, 9, 7, 6.