



PHYSICAL HEALTH

EMBRACE THE JOYS AND BENEFITS OF RUNNING

The benefits of physical activity, such as running, start immediately. “A little bit is good, but a little bit more is probably better,” Harvard Health Publishing (Harvard) quotes cardiologist Dr Aaron Baggish.

The “feel good” factor

It’s common to feel good after a run, Johns Hopkins Medicine (Johns Hopkins) neuroscientist David Linden says, “Exercise has a dramatic antidepressive effect ... it blunts the brain’s response to physical and emotional stress.”

Other benefits include “improved working memory and focus, better task-switching ability, and elevated mood”.

Extending life

Harvard discusses a study that found “even five to 10 minutes a day of low-intensity running is enough to extend life by several years”. The study followed a group of more than 55,000 men and women, ages 18 to 100. About a quarter of them were runners. “Over 15 years, those who ran just 50 minutes a week or fewer at a moderate pace” had a lower risk of death from cardiovascular disease or any cause.

Baggish adds: “There is no question that if you are not exercising and if you make the decision to start — whether it’s walking, jogging, cycling, or an elliptical machine — you are going to be better off”.

Immediate benefits

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says after “a single bout of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity” (running is considered vigorous, notes the NHS), you may sleep better and reduce anxiety and blood pressure.

Regular physical activity “provides important health benefits for chronic disease prevention”, lowering risks for:

- dementia (including Alzheimer’s disease) and depression,
- heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes,
- eight cancers including breast and colon,
- as well as helping bone health and weight control.

If you’re counting steps

Verywell Fit gives an approximate idea: “Running 12 minutes per 1.6km (8km per hour): 1,951 steps per kilometre”. Bear in mind that running strides are longer than walking strides. And individual stride lengths vary.

If you’re starting out

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines advises you “increase physical activity gradually over time ... Inactive people should ‘start low and go slow’ ... with lower intensity activities and gradually increasing” length and frequency.

It recommends appropriate gear and “making sensible choices about when, where, and how to be active.”

It’s advisable to consult a doctor before you start running.