

## THE MASTERS RUNNER

By Rob Maxwell, M.A.

I can remember when I took up running in my late twenties, and I heard the term “masters runner”, I thought “OLD”! Now that I’m 47, I have a different outlook considering a masters runner is a runner over 40! A grandmaster is a runner over 50 and a senior grandmaster is a runner over 60. Does a running plan change for a masters runner? I think common sense tells us it does. Let’s look at how.

### WHAT’S THE POINT?

First I think we have to decide upon a common reason why we’re running as “masters”. What is the common goal among masters? I would guess that it’s to be in the best physical shape we can be in and be as healthy as we can control. I’m sure we all want to be competitive. When I say competitive, I mean the best we can be. I think it’s important to be. But ultimately, isn’t staying in shape and being healthy the top priority? It is for me. We need to figure out this primary goal so we can think about what changes need to be made for a masters. With being fit and healthy as our primary goal, then the major change we have to make is to tweak our running plan so we can keep running. We’re not improving if we’re not running.

### RECOVERY

The biggest difference between a masters runner and a younger runner or athlete of any sort is recovery. The older we get, the harder it is for our bodies to recover. It doesn’t mean we can’t recover maximally. Of course we can, but it takes more effort. A masters runner needs to find a way to recover more. There are really three parts to a training plan: Frequency (how often), duration (how long), and intensity (how hard). The variable that needs to be controlled the most with the masters is frequency. Some might guess intensity, but they would be wrong. In fact, it’s the opposite. It’s more important to keep the quality high so fitness can be maintained. Duration needs to be looked at as well. Going super long will impede recovery. So if you’re going to go really long, there should be a good reason for it. But again, frequency needs to be cut back for the masters runner. A younger runner may get away with running daily or most days of the week. A masters runner needs more recovery. Again, the goal is to keep running. Probably the best plan is to have a day off or cross train between each running day, which means run every other day and make those days more quality days. But I don’t like to state absolutes. That’s what I would do, and advise a masters runner I coach. Sure, some folks are different and can still get away with running daily or almost daily, but I would argue most cannot. Running is high impact, so the connective tissues get broken down when we run. This is no big deal. They repair when we rest. But if we don’t rest enough, we don’t have time for the repair. This becomes even more critical for the masters runner.

### STRENGTH TRAINING

I believe strength training is the key to lifetime fitness. It keeps the muscle mass high so we’re metabolically strong. It keeps the joints and connective tissues strong so we can do what we like to do.

Look at a masters athlete who works out a lot. Don't they look great? Of course. Again, strength training builds the muscles up around the joints to protect the joints. Working out also has a positive adaptation on the connective tissues of the joints, so they become stronger, and the joints stay healthy. Working out needs to be a part of a masters runner's plan if they want to continue to be a masters runner. At the very least, it dramatically increases their chances.

#### FINALLY

We love to run. This is why we run and read this newsletter. One of my goals as a coach and trainer is to help people continue to do what they love to do. Two very simple rules to help our chances at continuing to enjoy this mode of fitness is (1) to cut back on the amount of days we run and work ourselves more into an every-other-day plan and (2) to strength train. If you like to exercise daily or almost daily, naturally you still can. This is where cross training comes in. On days you used to run, you could swim or bike instead. I think you'd find your overall fitness improving by doing this. Happy running!