

ChiRunning

as reported by NBC-17 Television Raleigh

December 12, 2007

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Doctors estimate that 70 percent of all runners will suffer a range of injuries that could sideline their training. But local runners say an approach to running that incorporates the mind/body energy of T'ai Chi is helping them avoid injuries.

Chi Walking

Carl and Pat Reichenbach enjoy running together. But it wasn't always that way. Pat's career in physical fitness and personal training have always been a part of their marriage, but Carl only watched. He didn't like to run.

"I just didn't have the breath or the aerobic capacity to do it," he said. "Plus my knees are weak and my feet are bad and everything just hurt."

Chi Running has not only turned Carl into a runner, but he's competing in races as well. He runs three miles a day and is planning to run in a six-mile race this spring. As a certified Chi instructor, Pat says the technique is really a return to a more natural way of running.

"Everyone ran when they were little, but at some point you stopped running," she said. "If you take it up again, even as a teenager, you now run with baggage that is your posture and alignment. And you now run with poor posture, poor alignment and bad habits."

Chi Running sets out to modify the way we run and calls on some of the basic concepts in T'ai Chi. Key elements include:

- Good posture, with emphasis on tightening the core, or abdominal muscles
- Leaning forward, not standing upright while running
- Picking up the feet while running, instead of pushing off the ground
- Relaxing arms and legs

"We really change running from a sport to a mindful practice, so it really becomes you thinking about your body ... being very mindful of 'what are my feet doing, what are my arms doing,'" Reichenbach said.

Physical therapist Flo Moses has seen plenty of running injuries in her career. Most of them, she says, are due to overuse.

"The body weight is magnified five to six times every single step when you run compared to walking," she said. "That increases the amount of stress, so problems are manifested with running that may not come out with normal everyday activity"

But changing your running style on a whim can also lead to injuries. Moses cautions that it's important for runners to understand the technique before incorporating it into their daily routine. In the meantime, she says thorough stretching and a good pair of shoes can be an easy way to reduce injuries.