

# Fascia Fitness

As runners, we always hear that “yoga is good for your running.” Turns it, it’s all in the fascia.

**W**hy do injuries happen? Why do people say they’ve hurt their knee when running, when in fact they haven’t really hurt their knee?

“Imagine when you step forward with your right leg, your left hand or left shoulder also comes forward. So if there’s a problem with your left shoulder, you’re going to shorten your arm swing, and then shorten your gait on the other side, which in turn has repercussions to your knee,” points out Dr. Anna Davenport, sports medicine physician at York University in Toronto. “When I look at a knee injury, it’s more about why did this happen. The medical world has been trained that, for a sore knee, you check out the knee; we don’t look globally at how we are all connected. But when you run, it’s about your body, everything moves – your fingers, ankles, even your big toe. But the key to this connected system is your fascia.”

## So what is fascia?

Davenport offers this analogy: when you peel back the skin of an orange, all the white stuff under the skin – those little white tentacles that cover the surface of the orange – think of it as fascia. Each orange segment is like the muscle, and when you break it open, there are even more white tentacles, and finally you get to the centre of the orange, which is the bone. “It’s a great visualization of what’s inside you,” says Davenport. “We’re all

connected from the skin down to the centre. Fascia is the connective tissue in the body, the extracellular matrix of fibres, which can unlock the key to the real source of injuries.”

When we get injured, the fascia sticks together and we get these areas of densification or thickening that are deposits of hyaluronic acid, the body’s natural lubricant. It’s not necessarily a knot, but the layers are not gliding over each other as they should. “These thickenings cause abnormal motion patterns, diminish circulation and cause nerve entrapment. The goal is to have the system move in synchrony and that’s why those old injuries can come back and haunt you,” points out Davenport.

## History is important

Let’s say you twisted your ankle three years ago and you didn’t rehab it. That’s going to have a huge effect on your knee, because every time you do something like that, you change the fascia and the connective tissue in the ankle. You compromise your gait, then the knee becomes the victim.

“At this point it’s not about strengthening the knee,” says Davenport. “It’s finding out what things are failing in the system for the knee to get compromised. You have to go where the history takes you. When you’re younger, you can have an injury and nothing happens because you’ve got compensatory power, but as you age, you lose that ability and the fascia becomes stiffer.”

## Yoga as a means to fascia fitness

Yoga involves the entire body, and that’s why yoga is a great lubricator. “The fascial planes need to be stretched and need variation, not repetition,” says Davenport.

Christine Felstead, of *yogaforrunners.com*, along with Sean Vigue of *seanviguefitness.com*, know all too well the A-type personality of runners. Both encourage runners to incorporate yoga into their schedule. The variety of poses challenges the system.

“Functional mobility is paramount in overall health and well-being,” stresses Felstead and Vigue. “A key aspect of functional mobility relates to the health of connective fascia tissue. Dynamic yoga practices are necessary and helpful for runners to build strength and flexibility. However, exploring a complementary yin practice has profound and transformative effects, especially for runners. The slow-moving and long-held poses of yin yoga affects the connective tissue located deeper in the body. Compared to muscle tissue, which responds to strength and stretching in short spurts, connective tissue requires gentler movement but held for longer periods of time,” says Felstead.

“Running is very repetitive, and some muscles become overly tight and at some point will become a weakness, leading to muscle imbalances and injuries down the road,” says Vigue. “Yoga engages your upper body and helps smooth out those imbalances. The key is to take that first step and bring yoga into your schedule, especially as you age.” Vigue suggests starting with poses like downward dog and even just sitting cross-legged, which can help open up the hips, and don’t forget an extended side angle pose as runners will benefit from the side stretch. “It’s important to keep challenging your body, keep it guessing. Remember, it will only get better,” reminds Vigue.

Consider seeking a treatment provider with training in fascia manipulation. Although there are many forms of release techniques, sometimes chronic issues require someone that can thread the story together and find where the original restriction is coming from.—*Marylene Vestergom* **R**

**BELOW** Yin Yoga Saddle pose: This pose stretches the feet, knees and thighs, and arches the lumbar and sacral vertebrae. A perfect pose for runners.



Erin Gallagher