

Sometimes it's best not to push it

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I pulled up lame at about seven-tenths of a mile Friday. I was immobilized by a painful left hamstring. The hamstring pain began June 11. I have been running in pain for about six weeks, but I ignored it.

I am not one who embraces the maxim, "No pain, no gain." I kept running with the pain because I had registered for a triathlon in Katy on July 9 and another in Jefferson on July 16. I thought I could "run the pain out."



I couldn't.

I did a slow shuffle in the Katy triathlon and a slower run-walk shuffle in Jefferson. I finished both triathlons, but the hamstring pain worked down to my foot and up into my gluteus.

Runners are a stubborn and sometimes masochistic lot. When pain plagues us, we descend into denial and continue to push ourselves on the road. Once I ran with a severe case of plantar fasciitis until I took two or three painful strides at the starting line of a race and stopped dead in my tracks.

I headed for the doctor. He said no running for a month.

For that month I descended into a dark-blue funk and depression. If you have ever been around a runner who can't run, you know what I mean. I was miserable and let everyone around me know that I was miserable, moaning and whining about not being able to run.

In August 2000, my back hurt so bad I could hardly roll out of bed and my foot hurt big-time. The doctor diagnosed a strained back and a possible stress fracture and told me I could not run for two weeks. He said I could swim.

I couldn't swim. I hit the water and splashed through 25 yards and hung on the edge of the pool panting.

I persisted, and the swimming inspired me to tackle a triathlon. I finished my 21st triathlon in Jefferson, and the contest began with a half-mile, open-water swim.

I discovered that cross-training is not only a solution to injury recovery and depression; cross-training also is a good way to stay in shape in times of injury and an inspiration to pursue new challenges and experiences in physical fitness.

I made a wise decision when I stopped my run Friday and hobbled home. Hobbling home depressed me, but I shall not descend into the realm of the dark-blue funk. I have swimming and cycling.

I also have some time to reflect on why my old body betrayed me. Actually, my body didn't betray me. I betrayed my body. I pulled up lame Friday for the same reason that most runners experience pain and injuries: I over-trained.

I persisted in running with pain, which is not smart or logical. Runners are slow learners when it comes to backing off on training. At my age I should know better.

No, I shall not descend into the dark place I have descended during past running injuries. I shall stay fit in the pool and on my bicycle. In a couple of weeks, I hope I can hit the road pain free with a new enthusiasm.

Take it from an older and wiser runner: listen to your body and don't run with pain. Hit the road on a bike or jump into the pool for a few laps.

Running footnote: Don't forget the Great Mosquito Chase 5K and the Century Buzz Bike and Skate Tour on Saturday in Clute. I shall not be there to run. I shall be there, however, to cover the race for *The Facts*. See you at the starting line.

Bill Shaw's running column appears every other Monday in The Facts.