

YOGA *for* RUNNERS

by Andrea Blair Cirignano



Next month marks one of the most popular fitness events in the Pacific Northwest, the Seattle half and full marathon. The race debuted in 1970 with 38 runners and, in 2011, 11,000 runners and walkers participated.

No doubt that most of these runners know it is important to stretch and some of them may even turn to yoga for that benefit.

"As I've gotten older, running seems to tighten my muscles up more and more," said Gail Cromer, a 30 year runner and a yoga student at Yogavana in Mercer Island, "Yoga helps loosen me up again."

Yoga can be of greater benefit than traditional running stretches because dynamic stretching, which includes movement and stretches connective tissue and muscle, is a more effective way to prepare muscles and joints for cardiovascular exercise and static stretches, held for at least a few seconds, are better when the body is already warm from exercise.

However, yoga is much more than just a form of stretching. Yoga can increase strength, improve running speed and stamina and reduce pain and risk of injury, all of which lead to more enjoyable races.

It's not always practical to make it to a yoga class before or after a run but even a few poses done before or after hitting the track, treadmill or trail can work wonders!

Runners who only have time for one pose before a run may consider doing downward facing dog. Start on hands and knees, curl toes under, lift knees, press hips up and back and find movement to loosen and strengthen the entire body. Bend the knees, pedal feet, wiggle hips and lift one leg and hip at a time to loosen and strengthen the entire body.

The most important after-run pose is legs-up-the-wall. Lie on side with hips and feet touching wall and knees bent then roll onto back and extend legs up. Just relax and hold the pose anywhere from 10 breaths to 10 minutes. Legs-up-the-wall will reverse gravity after the toll it took on your body during your run, it will drain joints of the low body, relieve back pain and put the body into a resting state so you can more quickly recover from a run.

Writer Andrea Blair Cirignano is a local yoga instructor with a journalism background. She believes yoga is for everyone and that each member of the community could benefit from the practice in some way, shape or form. Her articles highlight the unique pairing of this ancient practice with a modern Pacific Northwest lifestyle. Find out more about Andrea at abcyogi.com.

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Robyn M Fritz MA MBA
Intuitive • Writer • Speaker

Space Cooperating™

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alchemywestinc.com
robyn@alchemywestinc.com
206.937.0233

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