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As most people know, running has many benefits – increases cardiovascular function and contributes to a healthy heart, tones muscles and burns fat, increases bone density, enhances mood due to beta-endorphin release...just to name a few. From time to time runners, however, encounter certain difficulties including joint pain, muscle pain, inflammation from overuse or improper training, cramping, and injury. Here are some natural tips to help ease some of these conditions.

- **Hydration/Electrolytes** – staying hydrated will help ease muscle cramps. Either water or water with electrolytes is best. Some sports replacements drinks are okay, but watch for excessive sugar content and food dyes. Caffeinated soda, tea, and coffee are not appropriate for rehydration as caffeine is a diuretic and will actually deplete the body of fluids.
- **Calcium/Magnesium Supplementation** – Both of these minerals act as muscle relaxants. A typical dose is 1000mg of calcium and 500mg of magnesium a day in divided doses. They can be purchased together in the same supplement from your local health food store. Be sure there are multiple forms of calcium listed on the label as calcium carbonate is not readily absorbed. If you experience loose stools, cut back on the dosage.
- **Glucosamine/Chondroitin** – Both help stimulate glycosaminoglycan production in the body which is necessary for healthy cartilage function. Taking them as a supplement may help to reduce joint pain.
- **Anti-inflammatory herbs** – In place of popping ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatory drugs, the use of more gentle, natural, non-irritating herbs can prove to be just as effective. Some herbs to consider include Curcuma longa (turmeric), Bromelain, Zingiber officianlis (ginger), Boswellia serrata, and Filipendula ulmaria (meadowsweet). Check your local health food store for combination anti-inflammatory herbal supplements.
- **Arnica** – Especially effective for injury that involves pain, swelling, bruising and muscular strains. For the homeopathic remedy, use a dose of 12c or 30c once or twice daily depending on the severity. Externally applied Arnica cream is also excellent for bruises or sore muscles, as long as the skin is not broken.
- **Epsom salt bath** – Effective for relaxing muscles after a run. Add 4 cups of Epsom salt to a warm bath and enjoy!
- **Antioxidants** – Any form of exercise will greatly increase the formation of free radicals in the body. Free radicals are responsible for the aging process and disease. Although regular physical exercise enhances the body's antioxidant defense system and protects against exercise induced free radical damage, it is still a good idea to take antioxidants including vitamin E, beta-carotene, vitamin C and selenium.
- **Sleep** - Sleep is necessary for the body to repair damage caused by the stress of our daily lives. Your cells produce more protein while you are sleeping. These protein molecules form the building blocks for cells, allowing them to repair damage.
- **Calendula Ointment** – can be used on minor cuts, scrapes, and chafed areas. Helps to increase wound healing and prevents scarring. Note: if bleeding doesn't stop after 15 minutes of applied pressure, you may need to seek professional medical care.