

Have you ever studied heat results posted on bulletin boards at races? There is a consistent pattern: the first heat is when teams post their best times and the final heat is when they post their worst times. Despite adverse race conditions, this is the natural effect of fatigue. However, this is not the whole story. Observing the race results of two teams in close rivalry sometimes tells a different story: while both teams exhibit gradual decline in speed through several heats, Team A posts faster time than Team B during first two heats but Team B beats Team A in the final race. The reason? Team A runs out of gas more quickly than Team B.

How much endurance and strength you and your teammates have is a key factor determining whether your team can sustain multiple heats and beat a close rival at the right moment - the final race. This is where physical conditioning plays a vital role in addition to on-water practice. Perfect execution requires physical conditioning outside of dragon boating, both during the on- and off-season.

Once your dragon boat technique is consistent and effective, speed is acquired through both strength and endurance. The explosive power you need in a race comes from having strong muscles and well-conditioned lungs. A properly conditioned body is also the best defense against injuries.

Many people like alternating two or more types of cardiovascular exercises. There is a wide range of possibilities: aerobic dance, cycling or stationary biking, cross country skiing, rollerblading, running, step exercises, swimming, etc.

Running is a very popular and effective cardiovascular exercise. The equipment is simple: a pair of running shoes. As a weight-bearing exercise, running also increases bone density, which can fend off osteoporosis. Studies have shown the health benefits of running to be tremendous, reducing your chances of everything from the common cold to cancer.

Running is among the best aerobic exercises for physical conditioning of your heart and lungs. It helps ensure the efficient flow of blood and oxygen throughout the body decreasing the risk of a heart attack. The large muscle exercise it provides helps keep the cardio system efficient and strong. In fact, the heart of an inactive person beats 36,000 more times each day than that of a runner, as running keep the arteries open and the blood flowing smoothly.

Running also helps maximize the lungs' potential, keeping them strong and powerful. While deep breaths force the lungs to use more tissue, the 50% of normally unused lung potential is utilized. Even smokers can sometimes recover full lung potential through running.

Running helps lower blood pressure by maintaining the elasticity of the arteries. As a person runs, his or her arteries expand and contract more than usual,

keeping the arteries elastic and the blood pressure low. In fact, most serious runners have unusually low blood pressure.

Running -- like dragon boating -- is a great stress-reliever and may even relieve mild depression. Most runners will say their addiction goes beyond the physical benefits they achieve from running. Many runners enjoy reaching the "runner's high" -- that euphoric, clear, and calm state they feel after a long run.

In fact, this euphoria comes from a beta-endorphin release triggered by the neurons in the nervous system. Intended to alleviate the pain after a run, it creates a feeling of extreme happiness and exhilaration. Runners become addicted to this intense high, as do avid dragon boaters, and it can often replace other addictions to drugs, alcohol, and even food.

Both runners and dragon boaters claim to achieve more energy in daily life from these activities, which also helps bring appetite, exercise and food into balance. Furthermore, these sports makes our bodies function better, it improves sleep, eating, and relaxation.

While running is often viewed as a solitary sport, many people run because they like to socialize and be part of a running community. With group running, you get your own personal cheering squad. Members of running clubs and teams root each other on during races and support one another through long runs, or inclement weather.

Anyone who has run with a group knows that it's a great opportunity to get to know people with similar interests, similar to post practice pub nights within the dragon boat community!

Learn to Run clinics are based on providing sound information on biomechanics, injury prevention and safety,. The sessions create a supportive, social forum while building a solid running foundation using a walk/run program over ten week duration.

If you are interested in learning to run or joining a Running Club, more information can be found at www.runningroom.com



Connie Mellaart is a KDBC dragon boat junkie and coach, a two time marathoner and a Running Room Instructor.