



Going Off the Beaten Path Can Help Avoid Overuse Injuries

Some of the most beautiful and accessible trails in the world are at our feet here in the Pacific Northwest. Getting off the beaten, asphalt path can be one of the most liberating experiences a runner can have - not to mention one of the best ways to avoid overuse injuries. On trails the surface is rarely predictable, so the feet, ankles, knees, hips, and back are forced to constantly adapt, and one step is never exactly like the next. While this is generally great for the muscles and joints, there is always the increased possibility of a fall, rolled ankle, sprained knee, or worse.

Running on trails requires a bit more core strength and reaction speed to prevent major injuries. This core reaction timing takes training and lots of perfect repetitions. Generally, the surface under you should move unexpectedly, unexpected things should happen during the exercise, or both. Adding these dimensions to a general strength routine can reinvigorate your workout and help keep you safe on the trail!

Standard single-leg squats on either a dynadisc or doubled pillows helps train the ankles to work with the hips and back. This exercise is best performed in front of a mirror to ensure proper alignment. (Fig. 1)

The eyes provide our biggest clues to what is coming up, but sometimes this mechanism isn't enough. Balancing with the eyes closed, particularly when standing on a soft surface, forces the body to pay more attention to what is happening in the joints. (Fig. 2)

Partner drills can also be very effective. Catching and throwing a medicine or other ball while balancing or moving requires adaptation throughout the core and hips. (Fig. 3)

These exercises are not guaranteed to prevent major injuries, but they will help you roll with the punches.

By: Audrey Elias PT, DPT, Staff Therapist, TAI Physical Therapy - Port Angeles

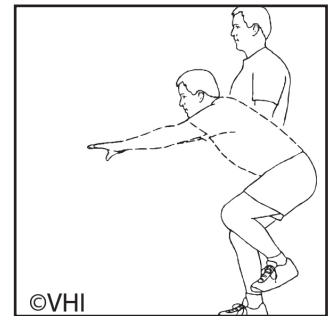


Fig. 1 - Single Leg Squats

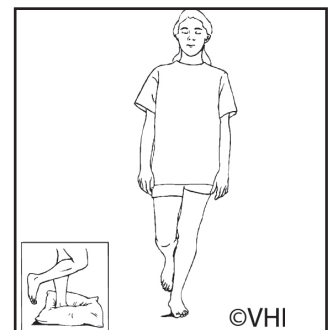


Fig. 2 - Single Leg Balance (eyes closed)



Fig. 3 - Medicine Ball Toss