

# Run-away success or just running?

Why do so many gym-goers head instinctively for the treadmill?

Is it because they want to improve their aerobic ability? Sometimes. Because they envy the carcass-with-lungs physique of long distance runners? Not in my experience. No, its because they want to burn as many calories as possible in their gym session, in the hope that these magic calories will remould and refine their bodies.

Unfortunately, aerobic exercise cannot sculpt anything and those who rely on running to tone their physique may find their buns of steel are decidedly doughy! If you witness the starting pen for any marathon, you will see what I mean.

So doesn't pavement pounding do the job? The problem is not the running *per se*, simply that aerobic activity (which includes cycling/swimming) has limited effects on the body. Running at a fast tempo will mean your body will use almost exclusively carbohydrates; fats, your slow-release fuel, hardly gets a look-in. My data shows powerwalking or slow jogging the most efficient way to burn fat for most people. Typically, running uses 10kcal/min with just 15% fat usage, compared to 7kcal/min with 80% fat usage.

Clearly, for most people, running is a poor fat-burner. Unfortunately, its not good at sculpting the muscles either – the muscles become more efficient but the shape/size changes very little. So, lots of sweat + lots

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of calories burned = little fat reduction and little response from muscles.

I suppose some fat loss is better than none, and you will at least get better at running! If running is important to your sport, or you enjoy it, then this is clearly a very valid reason to continue pushing hard. Plus, as with most exercise, individuals can expect an improved cardiovascular response, improved stress patterns and reduced blood pressure. As someone who has completed four marathons, I can tell you there is nothing wrong with running – provided you know what to expect from it.

If you want to improve the shape of your body, then you will need to increase your lean mass (muscle) and reduce your bodyfat. The most efficient way to do this is resistance training. This is press-ups, chins,

squats, etc – this type of training overloads different types of muscle fibres, raising your metabolism (and the rate at which you burn fat) for up to 72 hours after an intense workout. It improves your lean mass, and therefore your basal metabolic rate (the amount of energy your body uses up, just to stay alive, before movement).

There is always more than one thing to consider when looking to achieve success in regards to health and fitness. But very few of my clients have found what they are looking for on the treadmill. Work smart, not hard – calories are just a form of energy and burning them blindly rarely generates the results you are after!

**Marek Doyle is a personal trainer and nutritionist who, in 2008, was recognised as one of the top three trainers in the UK. With locations in South Kensington, Marek runs [www.blueprintfitness.co.uk](http://www.blueprintfitness.co.uk) and counts world champion athletes, models and TV personalities amongst his clientele.**

