

Why run long-distance?

HARISH LAKSHMAN

“You actually run 42 km? Non-stop? But, why?” Many long-distance runners have been asked this question by friends and family. For most people who don’t run, a 15-km, 20-km, 30-km or 40-km run seems unnecessary, daunting, boring, crazy (yes, a lot of people think that!) and, of course, also inflicts pain on the body, which results in injury. While injury is a major subject concerning runners, and there is a lot of literature on how it can be avoided with proper form and strengthening, this article focuses on why runners actually want to run.

Clearly, running is a fitness activity and perhaps one of the best aerobic exercises one can do. For most people, wanting to run usually starts with an underlying desire to lose weight, have some form of exercise to keep fit, reduce stress or blood pressure, etc. Studies have shown the health benefits to be significant, reducing the likelihood of everything from common cold to cancer. Your stamina increases. You lose weight — most beginners lose at least half a kilo a week (for a few weeks) when they start to run. And, of course, running is easy. You don’t need to sign up at a gym or buy a set of clubs. All you need is a pair of shoes and the motivation to step out of your home.

Health reasons may be why most people start running, but it's the less-tangible benefits that finally motivate us to persist, to become “runners”. There is no argument that running 5 km or 10 km three times a week will address all health and fitness issues. So why would anyone want to run long-distance? Because running long-distance is not just for the physical benefits; it is for the mental and, perhaps, even the metaphysical spin-offs.

When you run long-distance, you build not just physical, but also mental endurance — resilience, hardiness, the ability to handle pain, the strength to persist, the desire to succeed, and so on. Suddenly, you begin to see that there is a lot of commonality between long-distance running and life! After all, regardless of who you are — corporate executive, school teacher or homemaker — life is never a smooth or easy ride.

It also provides an opportunity to spend a little time with yourself and your thoughts, and a chance to develop increased self-awareness. As you become more aware of your own body, you also discover things about your inner self.

If this all sounds too serious, then let me tell you, running is fun. It is a social activity. Most times, runners run with others and end up making good friends and having a great time! Chennai has many running groups located across the city. You can easily join one near your locality and start running.

So, go out there and run. There is much you’ll find along the way.

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<http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/fitness/why-run-longdistance/article7141365.ece>