

I've tried sleeping pills. They work for a few days, but then I'm back to my old patterns.

I'd rather not change my current schedule; I've tried working out in the morning and it doesn't agree with me.

*Del Heuser
Kettering, OH*

I think your troubles are attributable to your overall schedule, not just your training. Exercising too close to bedtime can cause sleeplessness, but you leave more than five hours between the two, so this shouldn't be a factor. The problem is that you go hard from 6 a.m. until past 10:00 p.m. with no reported stops. Your body and mind can't immediately shut down after a day like this just because you decide to turn out the light.

Another problem is that your heavy nutrition is all at night. It's better to space your calories more evenly throughout the day, both for your energy levels and ease of falling asleep. Digesting over 2,000 calories at once takes a lot of internal work, and this could contribute to keeping you up.

On a personal level, I have found that as I've aged, I no longer sleep as soundly following a hard workout. Because it sounds like every day is a hard day for you, this might also explain your problem.

Besides spreading your calories more evenly throughout the day, I recommend allowing an hour or so of "down time" before going to bed. Get away from your work and listen to some music, do some light reading, take a warm bath, or anything else you find relaxing. Stay away from sleeping pills—short term gain for much long term harm.

*Earl Carstensen, M.D.
Aurora, CO*

Black Toenails

I get black toenails every time I run a marathon. What can I do to prevent and treat this problem?

*Dick Henry
Hammond, IN*

The first step is to make sure your running shoes fit properly. When you buy shoes, try on the size you think you should wear, the next size up, and even the next

size up. For example, if you wear a size 9, try a size 9, 9½, and 10. Buy the shoe that is the largest one that still feels secure on your foot.

Many people choose a shoe that is snug on their feet for a nice firm fit. Over time, however, shoes tend to shrink a bit, especially if the shoes get wet. Also, feet swell during exercise as blood flow to them increases. Running downhill also aggravates the injury by slamming the end of the toe into the end of the shoe. Try to give yourself at least a thumbnail space between the end of the shoe and your longest toe. Finally, in your case, make sure the toe box is extremely high and wide.

Besides your shoes, make sure your socks are comfortable. You may want to wear as thin a sock as possible. Some of the new socks have two layers but are still extremely thin and take up less room in the shoe. You may also want to apply Vaseline to each toe before putting your socks on to decrease the friction in the shoe.

If you still develop a black toenail that is painful, it is best to drain the toenail immediately. A sportsmedicine professional can perform this for you, or you can do it for yourself as follows: Work a small sterile pin or a heated paper clip slowly and carefully through the nail plate to open up a little hole. The black, which is known as a subungual hematoma, or bleeding under the nail, will be able to drain through this little hole. This should give you immediate pain relief. Next apply an antiseptic and cover with a bandage.

Another good idea is to cut your toenails before a race. Cut them straight across so they do not stick out past the end of the skin of your toe. This will also help prevent jamming of your toenail.

Again, though, the real trick is to make sure your shoes are large enough lengthwise and high enough in the toe box. Also, putting a shoe tree in your shoes after runs will help maintain the length of the shoe and avoid shrinkage. Finally, if your shoes are already tight, don't be afraid to cut the shoe open along the seam to allow for expansion. Making a slit in a shoe can go a long way toward avoiding these problems and does not ruin the shoe.

*Douglas Tumen, D.P.M.
Kingston, NY*

An Unusual Plant

How harmful or benign are the fats in avocados? I eat one nearly every day, because they taste good and I know it's important to eat a lot of fruits and vegetables.

*Jose Sobral
Sao Paulo, Brazil*

Avocados are a good source of some important nutrients. Half an avocado (about 2½ ounces) provides 14% percent of the RDA of folic acid, 13% percent of vitamin C, 12% of vitamin A, 11% percent of vitamin B-6 and copper, 9% of magnesium, and 8% of niacin. It also contains about two grams of fiber.

The problem is that avocados are quite fatty. California avocados get about 86% of their calories from fat, while the larger Florida ones get about 78% of their calories from fat. Even though these fat calories are not saturated, this is still a lot of fat. One avocado contains almost half the total amount of fat an average adult should consume in a day.

You're better off looking elsewhere to meet your fruit and vegetable needs. Enjoy avocados occasionally, not daily.

*D. Craig Huddy, Ph.D.
Boone, NC*

Ask The Clinic!

Are you bothered by an injury? Do you have a training question? If so, ask **The Clinic**, in care of AR&FA, 4405 East-West Highway, Suite 405, Bethesda, MD 20814. Free medical and training advice is an exclusive AR&FA membership benefit. Include as much relevant information as possible about your injury (type and location of pain), training schedule (typical weekly workouts, pace, surface), athletic and medical history, sole wear, recent changes in training, etc. Please type or print your letters. Responses take three to four weeks.