

# 6 Steps Toward Painless Running

By George Sheehan

If you want to run a marathon, you must train the Magic Six (miles a day). If you're looking for that natural high distance runners talk about, you must do the same. And if you would prefer to die of something other than a heart attack, the daily six miles is the physiological magic.

But know this: Disaster will pursue you to the very gates of this heaven unless you do another Magic Six: these are the Magic Six Exercises designed to counteract the bad effects of this daily training - the muscle imbalance that contributes to overuse syndromes of the foot, leg, knee and low back. Without the Magic Six, you will soon become an ex-runner, no longer able to accept 5000 footstrikes an hour on a hard, flat surface with a foot constructed for sand or dirt.

Training overdevelops the prime movers - those muscles along the back of the leg and thigh and low back become short and inflexible. The antagonists - the muscles on the front of the leg and thigh and abdomen - become relatively weak. The Magic Six are necessary to correct this strength/flexibility imbalance: three to stretch and three to strengthen.

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> **stretching** exercise is the *wall pushup* for the calf muscles. Stand flat-footed about 3 feet from the wall. Lean in until it hurts, keeping the knees locked, the legs straight and the feet flat. Count "one elephant, two elephants," etc. Hold for 10 elephants. Relax. Repeat for one minute.
2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> **stretching** exercise is the *hamstring stretch*. Put your straight leg with knee locked on a footstool, later a chair, finally a table as you improve. Keep the other leg straight with knee locked. Bring your head toward the knee of your extended leg until it hurts. Hold for 10 elephants. Relax. Repeat for one minute, then do the same exercise with the other leg.
3. The final **stretching** exercise is the *backover* for the hamstrings and low back. Lie on the floor. Bring straight legs over your head and try to touch the floor with your toes until it hurts. Hold for 10 elephants. Relax by bringing your legs slowly back down to the floor. Repeat for one minute.
4. The 1<sup>st</sup> **strengthening** exercise is for the *shin muscles*. Sit on a table with your legs hanging down. Put a 3 - 5-pound weight over the toes. Flex foot at ankle. Hold for six elephants. Relax. Repeat for one minute with each leg.
5. The 2<sup>nd</sup> **strengthening** exercise is for the *quadriceps* (thigh muscles). Assume the same position with the weights. This time, straighten the leg while locking the knee. Hold for six elephants, then do the same with the other leg.
6. The final **strengthening** exercise is the *bent-leg situp*. Lie on the floor with your knees bent and your feet close to your buttocks. Come to a sitting position. Lie back. Repeat until you can't do anymore or have reached 20.

It takes a little over six minutes to do the Magic Six Exercises, and after running, this means just 12 minutes a day.

