

HINDMARSH AND FITZROY PHYSIOTHERAPY

281 Port Rd Hindmarsh
Ph 8346 2000
40 Prospect Rd Prospect
Ph 8342 2233



TREADMILL V OUTDOOR RUNNING AND WALKING

So which is best ?

A question we often have from our patients who are either keen runners or walkers or even just starting out on their fitness programs.

Is treadmill running as good as running outdoors?

Many factors can influence a person's preference towards the treadmill or outdoor running.

There are many who love the fresh air and space that running gives them. Whereas others may enjoy watching a bit of TV while they exercise. Time constraints and schedules as well as weather conditions can play a part.

The environment and area we live in can also influence our decisions.

However for those who have access to, and enjoy both, here are some facts about treadmill running we hope you find useful

THE POSITIVES

1. The belt on a treadmill 'gives' a little as you run and walk. This means it can be more forgiving on our load bearing joints: the knees, hips, ankles and lower back compared to pavements and roads.
2. It is good for speed training – you can accurately track the increase/decrease of both the speed and incline.
3. It can stimulate a race environment: treadmills offer a variety of settings. This means you can set a speed/incline or intervals to fit into the type of race you're training for. It also has options for heart rate, fat burning or hill training.
4. If kept on a 0 incline, it is considered easier than outdoor running and walking. Therefore, it can be good for those who are new to exercise. *Note: a 10-minute mile on a treadmill is usually equivalent to around a 10.43 mile of 'outdoor' running*.(sorry its not in Kms)
5. You do not have any additional challenging factors such as; wind resistance and changing direction.
6. It can be good for times that it may not be safe to exercise outdoors e.g. after dark/in the winter or 40° C in summer !
7. You do not have to worry about planning a route/distance or needing a GPS tracking device to see your km splits. Again, this can be useful for those new to running.
8. It can help you to work on your cadence (the number of steps taken per minute). The 'average' is thought to be 180 (90 on one leg). Increasing cadence means increasing speed. On a treadmill, this will feel easier than outdoors. This makes it a good place to practice what your ideal number is and work on improving it (if speed is one of your goals!).

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THE NEGATIVES

1. The propulsion of the belt means that you get some help when 'pushing off' during running. This means there is less activation of the Hamstrings and Gluteal muscles. This puts extra work on the Quadriceps to complete the gait cycle. If you are using a treadmill, make sure you are mixing it up with some strengthening and conditioning work for the posterior chain muscles (gluteals, hamstrings and calves)
2. It can be boring! Top tips would be to have a good playlist or podcast to listen to.
3. Sticking to a 0.0. incline does not match the challenges of outdoor exercise. It has been shown that increasing the incline to 1.0 can help to mimic the feeling of running and walking outdoors. *Note: A 10 minute mile on a treadmill at an incline of 1.0 is equivalent to approx. a 10.13 mile and a 2.0 incline approx. a 9.43 mile*.
4. The belt does not offer any challenges to your balance, agility and co-ordination. When you run outdoors, you are constantly adjusting to changes in terrain, avoiding pedestrians, hopping on/off curbs etc. This can be good for maintain stability in the knees and ankles. Treadmill running will not offer this. This varying terrain may also be an advantage in avoiding overuse injuries from the repeated gait pattern on a treadmill.
5. There is quantifiable research suggesting that outdoor exercise provides greater benefits than sweating indoors. In one study, the researchers found that exercising outdoors was associated with greater feelings of revitalization, increased energy and positive engagement, together with decreases in tension, confusion, anger and depression. Participants also reported greater enjoyment and satisfaction with outdoor activity.

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IN CONCLUSION

In conclusion: If you are training for an outdoor race the treadmill can provide a safe environment to work on speed, cadence and generally 'getting the miles in'. However, it should not be a substitute for outdoor running. It is crucial to get experience of exercising in different weather conditions, on different terrains and without any help from the belt.

If you just want to keep fit and running or walking is something you enjoy - the treadmill is a great option. Just be sure to incorporate some strengthening for those muscles that get a little neglected. As with many aspects of exercise and life , variety is often a good thing so our advice would be to mix it up.





Our experienced physiotherapists can assist in helping you manage your musculoskeletal injuries. Visit us for a running walking analysis on our Hindmarsh treadmill to help identify any possible contributing factors to injury. Call us on 8346 2000 or 8342 2233.

OTHER RESOURCES

We are passionate about providing our patients and community with information on prevention and management

Please visit our [Blogs at hindmarshphysio.com.au](https://hindmarshphysio.com.au) for easy access to up to date information on many common conditions.

We have also put together a comprehensive free e-Book guide to understanding and managing common sporting injuries.

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