

RUNNING SHORTS

Safety comes first when you head out running

By Ken Johnson

Running is a great way to achieve and maintain physical fitness, however, you must do it safely. For runners, there are three aspects of safety: personal injuries, accidents and assault prevention. You can reduce the possibility of all three by using common sense and taking precautions.

There are several ways to avoid injury. Before running, warm up and stretch. Start your run slowly. When possible, run on a soft surface, such as asphalt, dirt trails, grass or crushed granite. Concrete should be a last resort. Wear well-cushioned running shoes. Wear suitable clothing to avoid overheating. The new “tech T-shirts” are best; 100% cotton shirts are the worst. During the summer months in the Huntsville area, you can count on it being hot and humid. Stay hydrated. Either carry water or plan your running route to where water will be available. After your run, cool down and stretch again.

Where you run has a lot to do with the possibility of an accident. Be cautious, especially when running on the road. If you are running on the road, use the sidewalk if possible. Run on the left facing traffic. If traffic is entering the road, make sure that you make eye contact with the driver. This is especially important when you are crossing a street and someone is making a right turn from that street. They are checking traffic to their left and if you are coming from the right, they will not see you. Run defensively. Avoid headphones and stay alert. If running with a partner, run single file. If running before dawn or after dark, wear reflective material. Better still, wear a flashing strobe light. Running at one of the tracks will greatly reduce the possibility of an accident. However, you may have to contend with a crowd or other runners and walkers or prohibited bicycles.

Luckily, assaults on runners are rare. However, several incidents have occurred in the Huntsville area over the years. While anyone out in public can be a victim of assault, runners are more exposed and can be vulnerable, whether running at the track, on the roads or on the trails. Run with a partner or with a group. Avoid dark, wooded or isolated areas. Stay alert and be aware of what is going on around you. Ignore verbal harassment and use discretion when acknowledging strangers. If you feel threatened, run to a public place and call the Police. Carry a noisemaker and/or pepper spray. Avoid a routine of running the same course at the same time everyday. At the same time, let your family or a friend know where you will be running. Avoid wearing expensive-looking jewelry while running and wear identification on the inside your shoe soles.

Safety is always an issue with running and other sports, but never let safety be an excuse not to run or participate in some other exercise program to stay fit. You have to do it for yourself – and for those who depend on you.

Congratulations to those Huntsville area runners who have been participating in races. Robert Duncan, 47, of Huntsville was the overall winner of the Stampede for Need 5K (3.1 miles) held on the Texas A&M campus in College Station on April 28. His time was 19:22. Even though Duncan was one of the oldest runners in the race, he beat out 100 other runners.

Three Huntsville runners completed the Texas Roundup 10K (6.2 miles) in Austin on the morning of April 28. Garland Spivey completed the race in 51:23, Joe Hernandez, Jr. in 52:08 and John Dunphy in 54:24.

The Spring Fling 5K & 1-Mile Run/Walk was held in Huntsville on the evening of April 28. Michael Deane, 23, of Huntsville was the overall winner with a time of 24:24. Other local runners completing the 5K run were: Hans Jaeger, John Cook, True Cousins, Jerry Flanagan, Edward Realzola, Christopher Wilson, Garland Spivey and Beth Caillouet. Completing the 1-mile walk were Nancy Wilson and Esther Cousins.

If you want to get out and participate in a race, there are many in the area. Check the Race Schedule on the Seven Hills Running Club web site, <http://www.7hills.us>. The next scheduled race (run or walk) in Huntsville is the Memorial Day 5K (3.1 miles) on May 28. All runners and walkers are welcome to participate.