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Thinking Outside the Doctor's Office

Runners Find Relief from Alternative Treatments for Injuries

By Catherine Kedjidian
As featured in the May 2005 issue of Running Times Magazine

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Some people swear by Sudafed and Tylenol to treat a cold, others by echinacea and chicken



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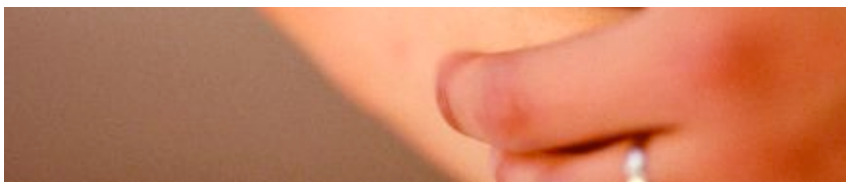
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soup. And a lot of people use both together, or each at different times.

Many runners treat their injuries with the same approach. You might start with a trip to the podiatrist for your plantar fasciitis, or to an orthopedist to uncover the source of your knee pain. But increasingly, a runner with an injury—chronic or acute—will follow up with some form of alternative therapy.

This approach is called integrative or complementary medicine, because it combines mainstream medical care with alternative treatments. These treatments fall outside of what is considered conventional practice among the medical community today, yet there is at least some evidence that these treatments work. Three alternative treatments that appeal to runners, particularly those who are willing to try something new in order to avoid surgery, are Active Release Techniques, acupuncture, and prolotherapy. And, in more and more instances, the podiatrist or orthopedist refers the runner out to these therapies.

"I'm a big believer in alternative treatments," says Kevin Plancher, M.D., of Plancher Orthopaedic & Sports Medicine in New York. Plancher, an orthopedic surgeon who provides medical care to runners at the New York City Marathon, says two of the most common running injuries—plantar fasciitis (PF) and iliotibial band (ITB) syndrome—are the best candidates for alternative therapy. "I'm an orthopedic surgeon. I believe structural problems are the cause of many issues," he says. But he admits that not all problems are structural. "Both ITB syndrome and PF have a lousy track record with traditional treatments." So, for those problems, and for others that don't respond to traditional therapy, he turns to his list of alternative treatment providers and determines the best treatment to help his patient.

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