



Find Your Balance

Most injuries are a response to an imbalance in the body. Correct the imbalance and you are on your way to pain-free running! And all it takes is a few leaflets of the Yellow Pages in your running shoes. – BY MICHELLE PIETERS

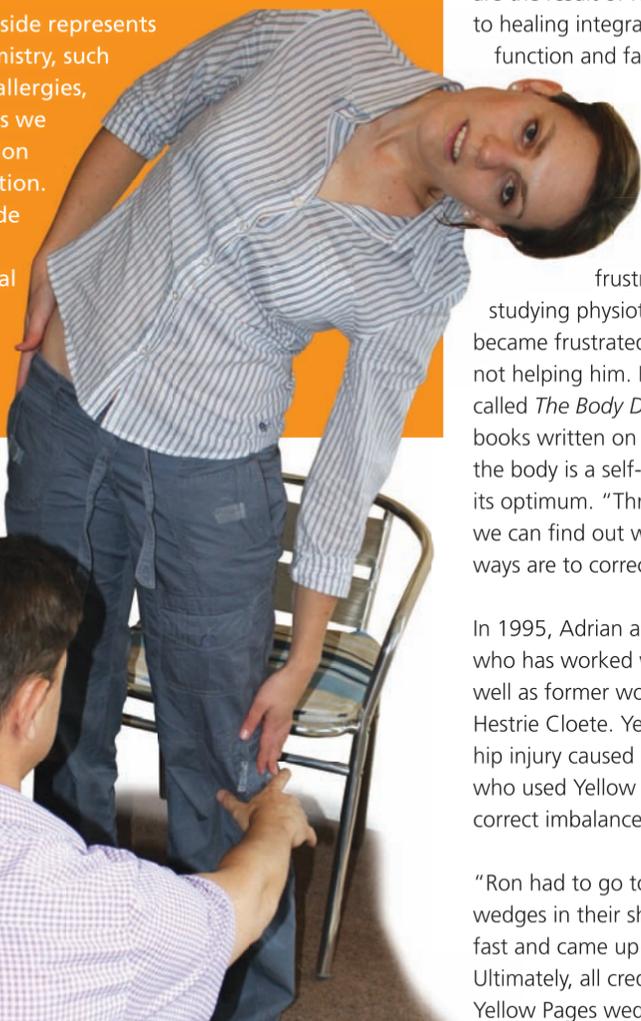
In a perfect world, you would be able to bend equally far on the right and left, your shoulders and hips would be parallel, your legs would be the same length, all your bones would be correctly aligned and your muscles, as well as connective tissue, would have equal tension.

Unfortunately, few of us live in this perfect world, especially us runners who try to juggle a busy career and family life with daily training. We all have to deal with daily stresses at work, at home and on the road, often leading to a disruption in the natural equilibrium of our bodies. And when the body is out of balance, more often than not, injuries follow.

But there is a solution, says Fourways-based, Johannesburg physiotherapist and kinesiologist, Adrian Stevens. He believes that the body's nervous system responds to emotional, physical, nutritional and energetic stresses in a predictable manner. "Only when the body is in balance, can one expect fewer injuries," says Adrian.

He compares the human body to a triangle, with each side representing a different part of our lives.

- One side represents the structural aspect, such as the camber of the road we run on, the type of shoes we wear, the position we sit in at our desks, and the physical injuries we have picked up over the years.
- The second side represents our biochemistry, such as possible allergies, supplements we take, nutrition and medication.
- The third side represents psychological aspects – how we think, feel and react.



"All these things are connected," says Adrian. Practically, it can be explained as follows: you are training for Comrades, but a couple of weeks before, you run on a severe camber and start feeling a slight twitch in your calf muscle. At the same time, you are stressed at work, which causes your adrenalin levels to increase. Your brain and spinal cord release neurotransmitters depending on how you think and feel. If you are stressed, it can have an influence on, for example, your hormones and digestion. The membranes around your brain and spinal cord also control tension of the cranial bones in your spine and the posture of your spine.

Now combine the emotional stress you feel at work or home with the slight niggle in your calf muscle and you will have thrown your whole body out of its natural equilibrium. Loading your body in different ways can lead to many problems. "Injuries are a response to an imbalance. If you run with an imbalance, it will cause certain muscles to become tighter and others to become looser – resulting in your body moving further and further away from equilibrium," says Adrian.

BALANCING ACT

Adrian has developed an Integration® Technique which is aimed at achieving a structural, biochemical, psychological, energetic balance, and overall optimal health. "Manipulating the nervous system helps the body release the bad habits and postures that are the result of repeated and long-term stress. This approach to healing integrates the nervous system to return to optimum function and facilitates the body's ability to heal itself."

Adrian does not treat patients in the traditional manner of physiotherapy.

He follows a more holistic approach to healing and believes in 'curing the cause, not the complaint'. He knows and understands the frustration of a nagging injury. As a young student studying physiotherapy, he battled with back problems and became frustrated because the techniques he was learning were not helping him. He tried acupuncture and also read a book called *The Body Doesn't Lie* by John Diamond. It's one of the first books written on kinesiology and promotes the concept that the body is a self-healing organism that needs to be working at its optimum. "Through our nervous system and muscle testing, we can find out what is wrong with the body and what the best ways are to correct it."

In 1995, Adrian also met Ron Holder, a well-known kinesiologist who has worked with former world record holder Elana Meyer as well as former world champion high jumpers, Jacques Freitag and Hestrie Cloete. Years ago, Ron also helped Zola Budd overcome a hip injury caused by her running style. Initially, Ron was the one who used Yellow Pages to build up wedges for shoes in order to correct imbalances.

"Ron had to go to Europe and some of his patients who had wedges in their shoes started coming to me. I had to learn fast and came up with a concept as to how the wedges work. Ultimately, all credit must go to Ron. He was the developer of the Yellow Pages wedges."

// The body will start healing itself as soon as it's in balance and there is no longer more stress on one side than the other. //



HOW IT WORKS

Adrian integrates complementary medicine with his treatments. This includes acupuncture, body alignment and kinesiology, which help the body recover from illness and injury by restoring its energy balance. Kinesiology is a way of getting your body back in line.

The cornerstone of Adrian's treatment lies in balancing the body by relieving unnatural pressure from muscles. He performs an initial test by asking you to push your arms up against his.

"This is an easy and quick way to establish on which side of the body your stresses lie," says Adrian. In a follow-up test with your shoes off, you reach as far as you can down the side of one leg, then the other. If an imbalance exists, the one arm usually travels further down than the other. Adrian looks for a muscle that tests weak and tries to ascertain why that muscle is not functioning properly.

A small layered wedge made from the Yellow Pages helps to correct these posture problems, so Adrian experiments with different thicknesses of wedge until he finds the right balance, making tiny adjustments until happy. He then tapes the wedge together with masking tape and fixes it to the bottom of the insole of your shoe. The wedge, which fits into the shoe of the weak leg, helps to change the behaviour of the muscles. Only when you are balanced, can you use your body effectively. With time and as your body adjusts, Adrian takes the pages out bit by bit to make the wedge thinner. "The body will start healing itself as soon as it's in balance and there is no longer more stress on one side than the other," says Adrian.

"When you run with the wedge, your footfall corrects the biomechanics of your body. The wedge stimulates the nervous system in the foot, which helps with your balance. As you run and walk, the loose muscles will become tighter and the tight muscles will become looser. These wedges are not uncomfortable, but have to be hard to cause a change in the nervous system."



ADRIAN PERFORMS AN INITIAL TEST TO ESTABLISH ON WHICH SIDE OF THE BODY YOUR STRESSES LIE.

EASY RUNNING

While running with the wedge in your shoe, you will probably feel your gait is smoother; this is because you are no longer wasting energy trying to keep yourself upright and in balance. After a while, the wedge might start irritating you because it is over-stimulating your nervous system and needs to be lowered.

"We all tend to have a kink in our armour. When we are under stress, we will injure or weaken in the same pattern. Runners need to remember that when they are injured, the most important thing is to fix the underlying problem and not just concentrate on the injury," says Adrian. Only looking at the symptom or injury will give temporary relief, but the same or another compensatory injury is likely to follow if postural imbalances are not corrected. Once you are balanced, you will experience many happier and pain-free miles on the road, states Adrian.