**The Benefits of the GYROTONIC EXPANSION SYSTEM® for Runners**

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As people who love to run, you know that your continued enjoyment of it depends on taking care of your body. The **GYROTONIC EXPANSION SYSTEM**® is a comprehensive movement program that can help you do just that with applications to improve performance, help prevent and rehab injuries, and even some TLC to recuperate the runner’s mind, body and spirit.

The **GYROTONIC®** method was created by Juliu Horvath, an overall athlete (ballet, swimming, gymnastics, rowing and other sports) to rehab and return to movement after rupturing his Achilles tendon and damaging several disks in his back. It is a form of exercise that stretches and strengthens the muscles and tendons while simultaneously articulating and mobilizing the joints. Coordination, endurance, and aerobic activity are increased through the engagement of corresponding breathing patterns and rhythm. Through a key concept, “narrowing of the pelvis”, immense core strength and lumbo-pelvic stability are created. Coupled with uniquely circular, multi-planal actions of the spine and joints, the body becomes mobile and responsive. The body is not held and fixed in a stiff, neutral position, but, rather, the result is functional, integrated strength and ease of movement. The system includes several pieces of equipment and also has a “mat” version, the **GYROKINESIS®** method**.**

Let’s consider how these components of Gyrotonic exercise apply to running. Imagine that your spine is like a building that is affected by the impact of each step you run, like a little earthquake. If the structure of the building is too rigid and/or its core is weak, the quake causes more damage. However, if the structure is built with a strong core and the ability to sway with the impact, less damage is done. With the Gyrotonic exercise method, the spine and joints are moved in every possible direction and the intrinsic stabilization of the body is improved by reaching equally in contrasting directions while gently engaging the core muscles. This supple strength allows the body to absorb more impact with less injury. The body becomes more cat-like, and, if you’ve ever seen a cat fall, land on its feet and saunter off, you know how incredibly resilient their structure is!

The concept of “narrowing the pelvis”, mentioned earlier, creates core support and may also improve the common problem of pronation, which leads to injuries throughout the kinetic chain. Support comes from “wrapping” the legs so the femur heads draw under the body, engaging the hamstrings, adductors, and pelvic floor, and making it much harder to pronate. This also leads to open hip flexors and length in the lower back and hamstrings, areas that tend to tighten up in runners. The pelvic floor strength leads to a lift in the lower abdominals in a three-dimensional manner, rather than corseting the Transverse Abdominis or lifting only from the frontal Rectus Abdominis. It feels like this strength buoys the torso above it, almost like it’s floating on water, thus decreasing stress in the neck, shoulders, and back and allowing free and natural breathing. Natalie Alon, (Sports & Therapeutic Massage Therapist, Pilates teacher, **GYROTONIC®** Trainer, and the Zimbabwean 400m Champion & National record holder 1979-1986), credits the Gyrotonic technique with saving her back from years of tucking and jamming by stabilizing her sacrum and sacroiliac joint, opening her hips, lengthening her hamstrings & psoas, and creating more freedom in her movement.

The ankles and feet are also strengthened and articulated with Gyrotonic exercise, which further helps decrease pronation and increases the ability of the feet to aid in forward propulsion. The muscles do not lock, but rather have a pulsing quality as the legs and spine reach softly in contrasting directions, further increasing muscular stability, motility, power, and balance.

In reference to our earlier feline imagery, another relevant thing about cats is that they are able to conserve energy because every part of their body is working in tandem. Rather than having to tighten here and tense there to pull oneself along, Gyrotonic exercises train the body to work in concert thus conserving energy, a clearly vital thing when running! It also leads to greater balance, as balance is not about holding but more about continuous subtle adjustments, like tuning the dial on a radio. According to Ms. Alon, it also balances the muscles on both sides of the body through bilateral movements. In addition to musculoskeletal benefits, the rhythm and breath help to create a synergy amongst all the bodily systems. It has a calming effect on the nervous system, which in turn helps to support an optimum psychological state for peak performance.

This relaxing effect also makes the Gyrotonic method a perfect form of revitalizing cross-training and recuperation for runners. Participants often equate the feeling to having had an invigorating workout and a relaxing massage at the same time. Indeed, the spiraling movements found in this system impact and release the soft tissue, providing some of the benefits of body work such as massage. The gentle stretching brings additional blood and nutritional supply to highly taxed areas of the body. The system is challenging, requiring focus and concentration, yet the effects are self-nurturing. It teaches a healthy balance of effort and non-effort, a useful perspective for both running and life. Joan Weisberg, a local triathlete, says, “Even if you’re not kinesthetically aware, I think after a couple sessions, you’ll be running differently. This is really freeing!“. A very exciting thing is that the above benefits occur simultaneously in the system, and thus, with practice, easily correlate to other activities that require multiple layers of coordinated movement, like running.

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