

SIDE STITCHES AND ABDOMINAL CRAMPING

How often we as coaches hear our athletes complaining about side stitches or the so called milt pain. Blaming it all together on the milt would be unfair and misunderstood. So what would the explanation to this pain be?

Side stitches are muscle spasms caused by the conflicting movement of the internal organs and the diaphragm while running. When the diaphragm moves up and the organs moves down pain and spasm can result from the strain on the intercostals muscles (rib).

Most of the times the pain occurs on the right side of the abdomen because of the heavy weight of the liver.

Side stitches are linked to breathing patterns. Runners coordinate stride and breathing patterns by exhaling on the same left or right leg foot strike. Thus if it happens that a runner would exhale on the right foot strike the friction between the diaphragm and the liver can cause a side stitch. Changing this runners breathing pattern can alleviate these cramps. Athletes should not eat heavy solid foods at least 2 hours before running. The weight of a full stomach increases the like hood of a side stitch. A lack of fitness, running hard on a down hill and cold weather can also contribute to side stitches.

Exhaling forcefully can relieve diaphragm spasm. Belly or diaphragmatic breathing (rather than chest breathing) pushes organs downwards to alleviate or prevent side stitches.

Research also indicates that runners with strong abdominal muscles have fewer problems with side stitches.

I found that doing 2 sets of 20 sit ups also warms the diaphragm and abdominal muscles and help prevent side stitches.