

NOT JUST A WALK IN THE PARK

Part 1

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GOBI DESERT - MARCH 2011

After years of saying "I would love to try something like that", my wife finally gave in and for a birthday present, bought me entry in to the Gobi Desert March 2011; a 250km, seven day extreme running race carrying all my own supplies, other than water.

It's an interesting challenge, both physically and mentally to prepare for such an event. As an osteopath with a keen interest in sports injuries my first concern was to stay injury free whilst increasing my fitness and endurance. To achieve this, I am trying to follow some of the golden rules of training for any physical challenge:

1. Allow the body to adapt; i.e. progressive increase of training, both the mileage covered and the intensity of the sessions.
2. Listen to your body; if I am really tired or excessively sore then I try not to feel guilty if I miss a training session. Often fitness gains are optimised with rest periods.
3. Good diet and rehydration; eating a balanced diet, taking supplements and electrolytes helps me get the best from the training sessions and speed up my recovery.

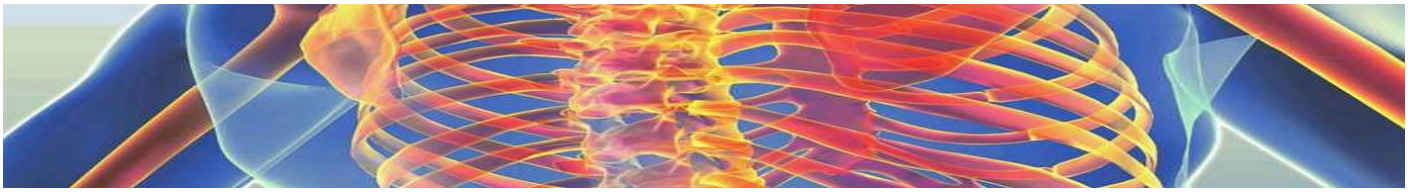
4. Increased stretching (like a lot of people I find this a little tedious); it's a fact, if you greatly increase your activity levels then the stretching needs to be increased as well. Stretch all the major muscle groups used for at least 20 seconds after training and if possible another time during each day.

5. Seek a professional; if stretching is not loosening off a tight area I try to get an osteopathic treatment (thanks to Barry McVeigh) or sports massage as a preventative tool.

Equally as hard is the mental preparation for this type of race. It's not always easy to do a full days work and then a 2-3 hour run, or to give up large chunks of your weekends (and that glass of wine or a beer on a Saturday evening) because you have to do a quality training session the next morning. The support of your family helps a lot; remember this is going to affect their lifestyle nearly as much as yours.

I have found it helpful to take one month at a time and set myself small goals to achieve, an extra 5km on my long run at the end of this month or an extra 3kg of weight in the rucksack, these small goals help break up the monotony of training.

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At the end of the day the old adage still applies; if you want to run a long way in a race, run a long way in your training but remember quality is as important as quantity and missing training due to injury is your biggest enemy. It's amazing how quickly the clock can tick away to that event or race.

Set yourself smaller progressive goals listen to your body and try to prevent injuries rather than deal with the after effects. And most of all don't focus only on the event, try and enjoy the training if you can; it will make those long miles a little easier to bear.

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