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Springing Back on the Pavement

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Especially after this brutal winter, rising spring temperatures are a welcome invitation for runners to trade the treadmill in for the great outdoors. Before you head outside though, there are a few things you should keep in mind to avoid injury.

As the co-manager of Athletico's Endurance Program and a marathoner, I know this transition can be tough at first. You may feel in shape from your indoor activities, but transitioning outside presents some different challenges, and I recommend using these tips to help ease your body into outdoor running:

- **Pace yourself:** Using a treadmill can be more forgiving than running outside on the pavement, since it is a controlled environment and softer surface. To transition to outdoor running, start with one-to-two shorter runs outside per week and build from there. If you rush into it, you can put yourself at risk for overuse injuries including shin splints, plantar fasciitis, and Achilles tendonitis.
- **Prevent Injury:** Your hamstrings do not have to work as hard on a treadmill compared to when you are running outside due to the propulsion of the belt. To get your hamstrings in shape, you can do an active warm-up of butt kicks, dynamic stretching such as walking like a toy soldier, and strengthening exercises such as bridging with heels on an exercise ball and curling in your knees to your chest.
- **Consider your running surface:** You may find that running on a dirt trail or asphalt is more forgiving than concrete sidewalks. Avoid banked roads and always remember to run against the flow of traffic when running on a road with cars.
- **Hydrate:** Remember to keep water close at hand and consider using a water belt to stay hydrated during your run. Drink 17 to 20 ounces of water two to three hours before you head out. For long runs, drink six to 12 ounces of water every 15 to 20 minutes. After exercising, you need to drink enough water to replace what you lost during your run (for reference, an average person sweats roughly 27 to 47 ounces per hour during exercise, depending on the intensity).
- **Lace up:** Just because you weren't running outside all winter long doesn't mean your shoes didn't get a workout. Be sure to keep a close eye on your shoes and replace every 3-6 months or 300 to 500 miles.

Keep these tips in mind when emerging from your winter gym to help avoid an injury and make the transition smoother on your body. Best of luck and enjoy the outdoors!