

GEORGE SHEEHAN'S



# VIEWPOINT

## PEARLS OF WISDOM

*The body of running knowledge condensed to seven essential rules*

When I was a resident physician, I carried a notebook on rounds to capture the "pearls of wisdom" that dropped from the lips of my professors. These were bits of hard-earned knowledge they had gleaned from years of practicing medicine.

This column contains some of the pearls about running that I have accumulated over almost three decades of training and racing on the roads:

**1. Listen to your body.** The body has information that is technologically inaccessible. Only the body can find that all-important "comfortable" training pace after taking into account innumerable factors such as climate, humidity, nutrition and emotional status.

The body also tells us when we're pushing ourselves too hard, not just in running, but in the way we conduct our daily lives. It starts with a scratchy throat or lightheadedness when we stand up or a slight rash after eating chocolate. If these warning signs aren't heeded, an upper respiratory infection or chronic fatigue state is sure to follow.

**2. Life is not a spectator sport.** Every one of us is an athlete, only some of us are in training and some are not. We were born to be active: first to survive as cavemen; then, as the Greek philosophers told us, to become whole.

**3. There is a healthy way to be ill.** This is an extension of the thought above. Patients are athletes who have become sick or injured. They require exercise to retard or reverse sickness, ensure fitness and maintain their self-image. With the appropriate program, even heart and lung patients and people on dialysis can be guaranteed fitness. This does not require, it should be stressed, that the primary disease be improved at all.

**4. You can age fast, or you can age slow.** Average Americans are 30 years older physiologically than their chronological age. Our aim is not to be average but to be nor-

mal, the best you can be. Athletes (see point #2) age quite slowly. The world's record at age 40 is within 5 percent of the actual world's record; at 50, within 10 percent; and at 60, within 20 percent.

These percentages can apply to your life, too. Take *your* world's record, what you can do at your best at age 20, and you can come within 5 percent of that at age 40, and so forth. It's a simple matter of adhering to three factors: Be in good health, weigh the same and train the same.

**5. In case of injuries, treat the reason, not the result; the cause, not the effect.** For example, injuries of the foot,

lower leg and knee are almost always due to a faulty foot

(such as Morton's foot, where the second toe is longer than the big toe).

Fortunately, in expert hands, the injuries

can be eliminated by correcting the abnormal biomechanics.

The treatments

might include some of the following: The appropriate shoe style for your particular problem, orthotic inserts or heel lifts for leg-length inequality. In knee injuries, it's best to start by *ignoring the knee* and treating the foot.

**6. Most exercise-induced symptoms (diarrhea, cramps, headache, rash and shortness of breath) are caused by food intolerance.** Continue to exercise, but limit your food intake to the B.R.A.T. diet (bananas, rice, applesauce and tea). If symptoms disappear, it means some food is the trigger—probably eggs, milk or something else that you frequently eat.

**7. When you run, three things happen to your muscles, and two of them are bad.** The prime movers—calf, hamstring and lower back muscles—get stronger. That's the good thing. But they also become short and tight, while the antagonists—the shin muscle, the gluteus and the abdominals—become weak. Thus, runners must stretch the prime movers and strengthen the antagonists. The final object: a balance between strength and flexibility. ■

