

Menstruation and running.

Approximately 50% of my runners in the Citlali Motion Runners Club are women. They make up a heterogeneous group that goes from under the 40 minutes in the 10 km to runners of marathon and ultra-marathon races, some of them just are trained to be good health, and others already retired from competitions whom were able to reach times over 16 min for the 5 km and up to 2 hours 41 in the marathon. One or the other, during all these years at some point they have approached me to let me know something related to their menstrual cycles, some of them presenting pain, discomfort to run or disappearance of the ruler.

Nowadays there are an increasing number of women around the world who run, either for competing in running trying to better their running times or just for joy.

Both of them, advanced and beginners female runners have days when they can perform trainings as stronger than usual, and other days when they know they could do much better their training but it is impossible, even the possibilities of competing well at the moment in which they wanted to do sometimes are decreased giving them certain level of frustration.

From the above said, it is also possible that many coaches also can feel frustrated because they see that the planning they have done for some important competitions seems to be lost due to the appearance of the menstruation in their female runners.

By the before mentioned I will tell that as a coach for many years I have had to do deal with this situation that in one or another way affects my runners and their performance in their trainings and competitions.

First of all, it is widely documented that menstruation does not only influence the personality of women. But also causes certain physiological changes that could affect directly to your athletic performance. Many of those changes are related to the amount of hormones produced by the woman's body during her menstrual cycle.

The menstrual cycle is marked by the changes that occur in the woman's body with the purpose of preparing her for pregnancy and usually lasts for 28 days, beginning with the first period day. During the whole cycle they can train, unless special an situations arise, excessive bleeding, much pain and others, but usually they train with the menstruation. The menstruation cycle is divided into phases:

1. Postmenstrual, which occurs during the first half of the menstrual cycle with a high increase in estrogen levels and great effect on the uterus, allowing it to grow. In this phase an ovule begins to mature in one of the ovaries.

2. Ovulatory, which occurs by the 14th days of a 28 day cycle. In this phase the ovum leaves the ovary and there are some changes in the woman's body temperature.

3. Premenstrual, which takes place during the second 14 days of a 28th day cycle, beginning the displacement of the ovum towards the uterus. There is an increase progesterone levels to prepare the lining of the uterus for a possible pregnancy. During this phase there are significant changes in the woman's body, among others: Greater respiratory volume. Reduction in the duration of the red blood cells. Increased the fluid retention with a feeling of swelling in the arm and leg muscles. Abdominal pain due to an increase in prostaglandin levels which intervene in inflammatory processes.

4. Menstruation, where the levels of estrogen and progesterone decrease with the flaking detachment of the ovum presenting a loss of blood.

In addition to these changes there are also some psychological changes that may suffer some women during the premenstrual phase, increased irritability and apathy, headache and menstrual cramps, without this meaning that all women have to suffer these symptoms. I had some female runners who suffer all these symptoms and I have had some to whom it does not hit them.

It is normal for some female runner to think that menstruation does affect their workouts and competitions.

In that sense, and based on what my runners had reported me, the performance, training or even their competitions results will be closely related to a variability of individual situations, as I said earlier, some runners do not mind at all if they are menstruating or not, they just train and compete as if nothing happened inside them and to others on the contrary side, some of them present at least one or all of the discomforts related before the presentation of menstruation, at the beginning of this or in both cases, with the deterioration or not of the running times. I had runner that have improved the Venezuelan's national records in full menstrual phase and I know of a woman who won one of the most important marathons in the world practically bleeding during the last 15 km of the career.

With reference to the planning of the training for the runner to take part in competitions, either in the first phase of the menstrual cycle or to have it in the second phase of this, in which there is a higher level of estrogen which could benefit their athletic performance. In particular, I do not give it more importance because there are not enough studies in this respect and there are many studies that have shown good results in both a phase.

There are also medical studies that show that any type of blood loss causes loss of hemoglobin, so there are those who consider that it causes decreases oxygen transport and for that it would not be convenient to carry out during this phase of the cycle exercises that require a high oxygen consumption, so the times and intensity of training should be decreased a little. As I mentioned

at the beginning, the number of women who train with me is high, which often confronts me with a diversity of situations, among them, pain, cramps, headaches and many others, in all cases my response has been the same: we train a little bit more smoothly, we motivate them a little more and they are recommended to attend specialist doctor who is really the person who can provide the best guidance in that sense. After all, before runners, they are women, before women are living beings and their body is always changing.