

Ideal Running Form: Pose Running versus Chi Running – Theory & Evidence

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Advice from coaches and personal fitness trainers can be classified into two categories: a theory-based approach or an evidence-based approach. Coaching advice is frequently based on a theory of why certain

actions work, or on evidence of whether certain actions work. A theory is a broad description of relationships and explains “why” something works. An evidenced-based approach is not as concerned with why something works, but “whether” it works. Ideally, evidence is based on randomized clinical research trials comparing at least two groups. Of course, a theory should be based on evidence from randomized clinical research trials, but there are times when evidence is gathered to support a theory and the evidence fails to support it.

A common theory is that an individual who runs with ideal form/style/technique will be more efficient and faster than a runner who does not have ideal form/style/technique. The challenge this theory presents to the coach, personal fitness expert or runner is what ideal running form is and how to achieve it. Currently, delineating what is correct or faulty running form is based more on theory than evidence. What is thought to be ideal running form is debatable and is based on limited data, anecdotal information and expert opinion.

There is a growing body of information on the topic of what good running form should look like. Two of the more developed programs are the Pose Technique and Chi Running. These programs have books, training programs on DVD, disciples/coaches/trainers, Internet pages and T-shirts. Both programs describe what the author or developer thinks to be ideal running technique/style/form.

The Pose Technique of running was developed by Nicholas Romanov. The basic tenant is that there is an ideal position (pose) for the movement of running. The perfect pose is with the runner balanced on his/her support; a direct line goes from the head to the tip of the shoulder, through the center of the hip joint, to the ball of the feet. The running pose is a whole body pose that vertically aligns the shoulders, hips and ankles in a support limb creating an “S” like shape of the body.

When running, the closer one strikes the ground to the perfect pose, and the quicker one gets off the ground until the next strike and pose, the better the running form/style. See www.postech.com.

A description of the Chi technique is based on the runner having good posture, which is defined in the book, as a slight forward lean of the body with the axis of the forward lean being the ankle joint and with the legs relaxed, and the foot picked up from the ground. See www.chirunning.com.



Both Pose Technique and Chi Running purport to increase running efficiency and prevent injury. When reviewing the books of the two programs, it is apparent

that there are similarities as well as differences between these two popular programs. Using an Internet browser, a search using the key words “Pose Technique versus Chi Running” will lead to a number of forums and chat groups comparing and contrasting the merits of each method. Danny Dreyer, author of Chi Running, has proposed the following when comparing Pose Technique to Chi Running. Both programs focus on leaning to engage the pull of gravity. Pose uses the leg more; Chi runners relax their lower legs as much as possible. Pose picks up feet and cadence; Chi running emphasizes lengthening stride. I could not find information of what Nicholas Romanov feels the similarities and differences are between Pose Technique and Chi Running. Reading the discussions on the Internet, it becomes apparent that many of the participants bring a bias to the discussion based on their personal theory and opinions rather than evidence.

A search of the peer-reviewed scientific literature for evidence identifies a few papers both supporting and refuting the Pose Technique of running in relationship to running economy, but I was not able to find peer-reviewed scientific evidence addressing Chi Running. No peer-reviewed scientific literature was found supporting or refuting

the contention that Pose Technique or Chi Running prevents injury.

In a study by George Dallam and co-authored by Nicholas Romanov (2005), 16 sub-elite triathletes were divided into two groups. One group continued their regular training program and the treatment group participated in 12 weeks of instruction in Nicholas Romanov’s Pose Method of running which globally altered their running technique. The treatment group (Pose Technique) showed a statistically significant decrease in stride length and reduced vertical oscillation in comparison to the control group. Shorter stride length and decreased vertical oscillation are thought to be a more efficient manner of running. Interestingly, despite the improved running form/technique, the treatment group proved to be less efficient after 12 weeks of training. Running economy was measured by the amount of oxygen consumed at a given sub-maximal running velocity. The Pose Technique runners consumed more oxygen for a given speed and distance. This is an example of when evidence does not support the theory that if you run with ideal technique or style you will be more efficient.

Other researchers have reported that attempts to manipulate running economy by altering self-selected stride rate or length result in increased sub-maximal oxygen costs (decreased efficiency). In contrast, other investigators have shown decreased sub-maximal oxygen costs (increased efficiency) as a result of manipulating stride length and rates.

The theoretical framework for either the Pose Technique or Chi Running seems to make sense. Both programs provide anecdotal evidence and testimony to support their contentions, but both programs would benefit greatly from randomized controlled clinical research trials which demonstrate that they do, in fact, improve running economy and prevent injury.

Despite contradictory evidence, it still seems plausible that runners can change their habitual running form to a more optimal manner of running and that this should help improve their efficiency. Thus, the debate continues as to what is ideal running form/style/technique.

