

*“Observation of Nature teaches us that the strength of a tree lies in its trunk,  
not in the branches and leaves.” -Danny Dreyer, Creator of ChiRunning*

**What is ChiRunning?** A mindful running practice that allows energy, or *chi*, to flow freely through the body. The focus is on relaxing muscles and joints, rather than strengthening the muscles and pushing the body harder. Today we will learn these four components of ChiRunning:

- 1) Breathing—inhale and exhale deeply through your nose.
- 2) Body Scanning—practice mind-body connection and focusing inward.
- 3) Needle in Cotton—maintain a strong center and relax your limbs.
- 4) Cooperate with nature—move with gravity, your momentum and the road.

### **What is Chi?**

*Chi* a concept in early Chinese philosophy of life force or energy. It is similar to *prana*, the word we use in yoga to describe—among other things—the energy shifts we feel during and after practice. In ChiRunning, gather energy, or *chi*, toward our center just below your navel and inform of your spine, and relax the rest of the body so it can flow throughout.

### **Similarities to Yoga**

- “Power running” is to ChiRunning as stretching is to yoga.
- Breathing and posture cues are similar.
- Both are practices that they help us learn about ourselves and grow.
- Both help us turn down mental chatter and become absorbed in the body-mind.
- Both require mindfulness and internal focus and strengthen these skills.
- Both encourage us to relax everywhere you can and direct your energy where it’s useful.

### **ChiRunning Skills**

1. **Belly Breathing** – *Breathe deeply in and out through your nose while you run, and don’t run faster than you can keep up this breathing.*
  - **Why?** More oxygen exchange happens in the lower lungs. Belly breathing is relaxing and releases serotonin and beta-endorphins
  - **Practice belly breathing:** Place hands over belly button. Purse lips as if trying to blow a candle out, and exhale, emptying lungs by pulling in belly button toward spine. When you’ve blown out as much as possible, relax belly inhale will occur naturally. Now try it with your lips gently closed.

2. **Body Sensing** – *Running can be a mindful practice, focused on enjoying how it feels rather than on external goals such as how we look or how fast we are compared to others. To maintain, requires contact feedback and adjustment between mind and body.*
  - **Why?** Learning to focus internally rather than external goals can be a big shift in how we approach our health and life as a whole.
  - **Practice body sensing:** Body scan lying down or seated.
3. **Needle in Cotton**– *Maintain a straight central column and engaged lower abdominals. Relax your arms, legs, shoulders and hips.*
  - **Why?** When limbs are tense, it's harder for oxygenated blood to squeeze its way into muscle cells, forcing you to breathe harder. Relaxing is an easy, efficient, light way to run. Staying relaxed helps us more easily accomplish a job before us.
  - **Strengthen your core:** From Bridge Pose prep, walk your feet away from your body only until your low back starts to lift off the ground. At that point stop and hold 30 seconds. Walk your feet back to starting position. Repeat 5 times. Progress to lifting your pelvis off the ground and holding, 20 seconds at a time.
  - **Practice relaxing limbs:** Stand with one foot slightly behind the other, hip width apart. Rotate spine and let arms, hands relax at the sides.
  - **Practice engaging the core to level the pelvis:** While standing, place your thumb in your belly button, hand resting at your low belly. Fake cough to feel abdominals engage. Engage those same muscles to lift the front of your pelvis and tuck your tailbone under. You should feel like you are doing crunches.
  - **Practice a strong central column:** Stand in a relaxed position and have a friend push on your shoulders. If your hips move forward, you are not aligned. Take your hips slightly back and your shoulders slightly forward.
4. **Cooperate with Nature** – *Yield to gravity, your own momentum and the force of the road. Move like a wheel, chest falling forward and your feet/legs swinging back.*
  - **Why?** It allows gravity to do the work, and causes less strain on your body. “When you move against a force, you give it more power. If you cooperate with a force you neutralize its power.”
  - Create a straight column from your crown to bottoms of feet. When you run, allow this column to lean forward (“lead with your heart”).
  - Don't reach out with your feet in front of you to grab for the road. This essentially puts the breaks on your momentum. Rather, let your feet land beneath your central



column, or a little behind it. Don't push or pull to propel yourself forward, but rather relax your legs and feet and allow the force of the road to swing your legs for you.

- **Practice the lean:** Stand with your column straight, pelvis level, core engaged and ankles relaxed about a foot-print distance away from a wall. Bend your elbows with your hands in front of you. Relax your ankles and calves and lean forward to catch yourself against the wall. Your heels should have stayed on the ground
- 5. Allow Chi Running to be a gradual progress - Give yourself time. It's a process of discovery, not a set a rules. Make changes incrementally.**

## Practicing Chi Running Posture

### 1. Align your feet and legs.

Mountain Pose: feet pointing forward, thighs spin inward, weigh evenly on feet.

### 2. Align upper body by elongating the spine.

One hand below collar bone, one below belly button. Soft shoulder. Don't arch low back or stick out chest. Now take top hand to back of neck and brush upward. Back of neck lengthens, chin tucks slightly downward.

### 3. Level your pelvis to engage your core.

With your thumb in belly button and palm beneath it, engage your lower abdominals and draw them upward.

### 4. Create your column.

Bring your hips into alignment with your shoulders with your core engaged.

### 5. Stand in your column with weight on one leg at a time.

In column alignment, stand with feet together. Slowly lift one heel off the ground at a time, shifting weight from one leg to the other.

### 6. The C Shape

The shortcut to good posture. Stand with pelvis tilted forward, core unengaged, chin tilted slightly up. Then brush back of neck with hand to make the neck long and chin tuck. Simultaneously engage the core to draw the pelvis up/level.

*"When your posture is correct, energy  
or chi flows through your body  
unhindered, in much the same way that  
water flows through a straight pipe  
more easily than a bent one."*

—Danny Dreyer, ChiRunning