

IT'S GREAT OUTDOORS

Chi running is a revolutionary style that takes its principles from the martial art of tai chi, using core strength, alignment and relaxation to increase efficiency and decrease chances of injury. Fiona Russell gives it a go.

We are born to run – yet most joggers and runners end up with niggles and injuries.

While running is reckoned to be one of the best forms of exercise, many people believe it's "not for them".

Now increasing numbers of people are hailing the benefits of a revolutionary style of running called chi running.

Although new to many Scots, chi running was developed as a concept in America in the 1990s by Danny Dreyer.

Ultra distance runner Dreyer was the first to take the principles of alignment and relaxation from martial art tai chi and combine them with running.

It is claimed that chi running creates more efficient runners who are less prone to injury. Most chi runners also report a new joy in their passion – and a discovery that they can go further or longer without effort.

There are only a dozen chi running instructors in the UK and few who teach in Scotland.

Nick Constantine leads regular workshops north of the border and

boasts a fast-growing fanbase.

Nick came to chi running after suffering years of injuries.

He said: "My American family sent me the book Chi Running by Dreyer and, while the title didn't appeal at first, I thought it was worth a go.

"After all, the promise of effortless and

injury-free running was very appealing, even if it sounded a bit over-egged.

"Within weeks, I noticed a difference in my running. I wasn't going fast but my movement was softer and more efficient – and the injuries vanished."

Nick, a former PE and maths teacher, was so impressed that he took a teaching course.

He said: "What struck me was that humans are born to run and walk well and all those patterns are intrinsic in our minds. However, modern society puts many obstacles in the way of these natural movements. For example, we wear supportive shoes for most of our lives and we are rarely aware of our natural environment.

"Chi running made sense because it's about slowing down and practising repetitive movements to help us to feel more like natural runners and walkers again. So many people – both new and experienced runners – are now discovering the huge benefits of chi running."



MAKING STRIDES
Learning chi running helps people reduce injuries and improve their endurance

“Movement was more efficient and softer and the injuries vanished”

RUN STYLE IS CHI



FIONA RUSSELL

Steps to chi running

I imagined my running style to be relaxed and efficient but a video filmed by Nick revealed I had picked up many bad habits.

I have a forefoot strike, hunch my shoulders, stick my butt out and look down at the ground.

Although I can run fairly fast, I tire over longer distances and I suffer ongoing leg and shoulder muscle tightness.

Nick offered a few seemingly simple tips to completely overhaul my running form. The correct posture for running is to feel tall and to lean the body slightly forwards.

He said: "This is not a bend from the waist position but a whole body gravity-assisted forward motion.

"And looking further ahead keeps the head and shoulders up and tall.

"Take a look at the Kenyan runners, such as David Rudisha, who are natural chi runners."

Core muscles are also important for efficient chi running.

Nick said: "The core is called the

dantian in tai chi and refers to the area in the lower abdomen, below the navel and around a third of the way inside.

"Energy moves from your dantian into the limbs to create movement."

Chi runners land on the midfoot and have a high cadence of 170 to 190 steps per minute. This felt odd at first, running with very fast and short strides, but it soon started to flow. It's important to bend the elbows and knees for improved postural alignment.

Chi running also promotes good mental engagement.

Nick said: "Runners are encouraged to relax and think about how the body is moving and how you breathe."

There was a lot to think about but, in practice, it all slipped into place.

I found that by engaging my core and relaxing my limbs, my legs somehow flowed through more easily.

And the more I focused on my running style, the easier it all came together. Many other newbie chi runners have also found benefits.

Jo Woolnough, of Oban, thought her running days were over after suffering

