

Body & Self

BY MEGAN OTHERSEN GORMAN

FAST BREAKS

Sheepless sleep: It's the night before your big race. You hit the hay early, but by 3 A.M., you're still wide awake. What do you do? Simply curl up on your right side. "Your heart will fall away from your chest wall, not into it, as it beats," explains Arnie Baker, M.D., a San Diego-based family practitioner, champion cyclist and a contributing editor for *Masters Sports* newsletter. "This switch in position can make a big difference to an athlete whose pulse is pumped up with prerace anxiety. A pounding heart can keep anyone awake. Why give it something to pound against?"

Hot flash: Masters runners, take note. You may want to pull off your estrogen patch before you slip on your Sauconys. Exercise will increase your absorption of estrogen, which could give you a post-workout headache.

Treadmill beats stationary bike by a mile! Researchers at the Medical College of Wisconsin and Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Milwaukee recently tested six indoor exercise machines—the treadmill, stairclimber, rowing machine, cross-country ski machine and two stationary bikes (one with movable handlebars, the other without)—to find out which form of exercise burns the most calories at certain rates of perceived exertion. The winner: our pal, the treadmill. In fact, when the study's participants exercised "somewhat hard," they burned 40 percent more calories running on the treadmill than pedaling on the stationary bike. First and second runners-up for calorie-burning kudos were the stairclimber and rowing machine, respectively.

EXERCISE AT A GLANCE

The Tupler technique

There's a reason we call childbirth *labor*. It's tough—a real physical challenge—even if you're 21:30 5-K fit. Sad fact is, you could run a gazillion miles a week and still neglect your abs—the very muscles you'll need to push the baby out.

Relax. Take a deep breath (think Lamaze). Here, Julie Tupler, R.N., a certified fitness trainer and childbirth educator, founder of Maternal Fitness (a nationwide labor preparation program run by registered nurses who are also certified personal trainers) and author of *Maternal Fitness: Preparing for the Marathon of Labor* (Simon & Schuster, 1996), tells you how you can peak for pushing. The key: The Tupler Technique.

What is it? An exercise that strengthens your innermost abdominal muscle—the transverse, which circles your waist like a wide belt and goes forward and backward when you breathe, and your outermost abdominal muscle—the rectus abdominus, which runs vertically from your chest to your groin.

Why do it? A strong transverse will ease delivery, and a fit rectus will prevent back problems during pregnancy.

How do you do it? Sit cross-legged on the floor with your back against a wall. Place one hand on your belly, the other on the small of your back. Take a deep breath, filling your lungs so your belly expands. Then exhale slowly, bringing your belly button back toward your spine. Stop at a point halfway between your belly button's natural position and your spine. This is your starting position.

To begin, bring your belly button back toward your spine, then return to the starting position. That's one repetition. Repeat 100 times. You should feel your back muscles working beneath your hand. Relax. That's one set—do 10 of them.

Tip: Remember to breathe. Your abdominals have to move back, toward your spine, to push out the baby. Not easy unless you're exhaling.

When to start: As soon as you know you're pregnant. And continue throughout your pregnancy. Working your transverse won't hurt your baby, who's well-insulated inside a very thick uterus filled with amniotic fluid.

Ab work: This exercise, in which you pull your abdomen in toward your back, strengthens your muscles for easier childbirth.

