Wellness Research and Consulting

Detroit Marathon Kills Three Runners in 16 Minutes

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By Al Sears, MD

On October 18th it happened again.

In 16 minutes 3 people lost their lives at the Detroit marathon.

Thirty-six-year-old Daniel Langdon collapsed at about 9:02 am on Sunday between the 11 and 12-mile markers and 65-year-old Rick Brown collapsed at 9:17 am, near where Langdon went down. One minute later, 26-year-old Jon Fenlon collapsed just after finishing the 13.1-mile half-marathon. [1]

When I was watched the news report I heard the announcer say sudden death "was rare" during marathon events. I guess that depends on how you define "rare."

In 2006, at least 6 runners lost their lives in marathons in the US. In March, two police officers, one 53, the other 60, died of heart attacks at the Los Angeles Marathon. Three runners in their early 40s all had fatal heart attacks during marathons in Chicago, San Francisco and the Twin Cities. And on October 29th, at the Marine Corps Marathon, a 56-year old man collapsed at the 17th mile marker, never to recover.[2]

In 2007, two high-profile marathon related deaths occurred here in the United States, one in Chicago and one during the Olympic trials in New York. A third runner died during the London marathon.[3]

In 2008 a young woman – Erin Lahr – collapsed and died three miles from the finish line during the Dallas White Rock Marathon.[4] And during the New York City Marathon two men died during the race and a third one died a week later. There was also a fatality at the Little Rock Marathon the same year.

I've seen this up close. Twenty years ago, I provided emergency care for marathon races.

At one event I was surprised to see a thin young man collapse to the ground just yards from our emergency aid station. His heart continued to violently race, as we put an oxygen mask over his blue lips. Another runner in his 20's made it to our station but had to kneel down to wait for emergency assistance. He was weak, dizzy and frightened, with a dangerously irregular heartbeat.

In spite of what all the so-called fitness gurus tell you on TV there is plenty of evidence that marathon running accelerates heart disease and on occasion can trigger sudden cardiac arrest.

Results from Boston area hospitals reveal the risks and damaging effects experienced by dozens of marathon runners they've studied over the last ten years.

Increased Risks for Marathon Runners [5]	
• Heart Attack	• Sudden Cardiac Death
• Hardening of Arteries	• Stress Fractures
• Lower Back Pain	• Blood in Urine
• Repetitive-Stress Injuries	• Permanent Bone Damage

Dr. Arthur Siegel, the director of internal medicine at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts and an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard University has authored more than two dozen studies on runners of the Boston marathon.

In October of 2001, Dr. Siegel published two studies in the *American Journal of Cardiology*.[6] Between 1996 and 2001, he drew three blood samples from 80 middle-aged male runners. They drew the first sample just before the marathon. They drew the second sample immediately following, and then a third sample a day after the marathon.

The results: Twenty-four hours after the race, the men – none of whom had any history of heart disease – exhibited early-stage signs of ***cardiac damage similar to the symptoms that appear during a heart attack.***

This happens because adding repeated "cardio" to our busy days and pushing for greater endurance produces the ***opposite*** result of what we need in the modern world.

Routinely forcing your body to perform the same continuous cardiovascular challenge, by repeating the same movement, at the same rate, thousands of times over, without variation, without rest, is unnatural.

Our ancient ancestors never ran for long distances without rest. Maybe it happened rarely but never routinely. It doesn't happen in the animal kingdom either.

Long-distance running shrinks your lungs and downsizes your heart's output. Nature designed your body to adapt to whatever environment it encounters. If you ask it to run long distances repeatedly and routinely, it will adapt to meet the challenge more effectively. When you run long distances like in a marathon you're actually training your heart to get weaker.

Why does this happen?

Your body downsizes your heart and lungs to enable the long run. A smaller output will take you long distances in the same way an economy car with a small engine gets you better gas mileage.

But that's not what your heart was designed for… it's built more like a Ferrari: powerful bursts over short distances with plenty of reserve power when you need it.

My PACE program is designed with that in mind. Your heart needs reserve power in times of stress and trauma. Small blood and oxygen output, which is what you get as a marathoner, spells heart attack.

If you're new to the idea, your first PACE workout will be a single period of exertion followed by recovery.

You will start at a speed and level of intensity that feels comfortable to you. Then you will gradually increase your level of intensity until you are panting and breathing heavily. When you reach this level of exertion you will stop and recover. ***That's it.***

This is the foundation of PACE. You start off easy, you gradually increase the intensity, you reach a level of maximum exertion, and you stop and rest.

To get started, you can walk, run, swim or choose an "instrument." An instrument is simply an exercise device like a treadmill, a rowing machine, an elliptical, a bicycle, etc.

Do one set and see how you feel. When you're ready do another set. The key is making progressive changes. Little by little you increase the challenge. Each time you practice you do something a little different.

The advantage of PACE is that it's easy to get started, no matter how out of shape you are when you get started.

To get my full PACE program, along with the easy-to-follow strategies that reverse heart disease, ramp up your lungpower and shed pounds of unwanted fat, click HERE.

It takes just 12 minutes and it's fully guaranteed.

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[1] Associated Press. Autopsies Planned in Marathon Deaths. *AOL News*. Oct 19, 2009

[2] Reynolds G. "Is Marathoning Too Much of a Good Thing?" *The New York Times*, Dec 7, 2006

[3] McGrath, T. "Are You Running Yourself to Death?" *MSNBC*, Nov. 1, 2008

[4] McGraw, D. "Runner Collapses, Dies at White Rock Marathon" *The Dallas Morning News*, Dec. 15, 2008

[5] Willdorf N. "Run for Your Life?" *The Boston Phoenix*, Apr 11 – 18, 2002

[6] Siegel A., et al. "Effect of Marathon Running on Inflammatory and Hemostatic Markers." *Amer Jour Card*. Volume 88, Number 8, 15 October 2001