

## Band Aid

Running's your thing. Pumping iron isn't. Still, strength training does a runner's body good. So here's an innovative solution: A fast, easy-to-follow routine that'll improve your running--no iron required.

By Sarah Bowen Shea

Strength training is a bit like flossing: We know it's good for us, but we don't do it as often as we should or at all. But successful runners do more than run they lift and lunge to build strong muscles for climbing hills, maintaining perfect form, and preventing injuries. Those of us who don't strength train certainly have our reasons. It can be hard to run well when you're recovering from a weight workout. Plus, squeezing running into your schedule can be tough enough. And you might not be keen on joining a gym; after all, one of the reasons you're a runner is that you can do it wherever you are.

Well, enough excuses: Tommy Sheehan, director of strength and conditioning at Columbia University, has designed a resistance-band program for runners that provides all the benefits of lifting weights with none of the hassles of traditional plans. Those who have swapped their dumbbells for these bands have gained strength and stability in less time with less soreness. You can, too, and you won't have to leave home to do it.

Get Started You can set up your own home gym with MTS Performance bands, which are available in varying resistance levels (\$25 to \$30 each at [liflineusa.com](http://liflineusa.com)), and a bench. Two or three times a week, put in your miles first, then do one of the sample workouts below, alternating between workout 1 and workout 2. Each takes 20 to 30 minutes. Except where noted, do three sets of 20 repetitions. Increase the number of reps each week until you get to 50 reps. Then increase resistance: Add another band or use a band with more resistance.

### Overhead Press + Squat

Stand on the band with both feet, holding the handles at your shoulders. Press your arms up and out to a 45-degree angle so your body looks like a Y. Maintaining tension on the band, bend your knees and squat until your thighs are at least parallel with the floor go lower if you can. Return to standing, then lower your arms to your shoulders. Repeat.



### Single-Leg Squat

Secure the band on the bench and stand with your left foot on the bench, holding the handle



photos by Erin Patrice O'Brien

in your  
left hand.

Your right

leg should be straight and hanging off the bench, even with your left leg. Push your hips back and down just as in the Two-Leg Squat, into the quarter-squat position. Push through your left foot to full extension. Repeat.

### Full-Body Workout Options

Workout 1 - Overhead Press + Squat; Bench Press; Two-Leg Squat; Bicep Curl; Overhead Triceps Extension; Ab/Lower-Back Extension

Workout 2 - Overhead Press + Lunge; Bench Press; Single-Leg Squat; One-Arm Row, Shoulder Press; Triceps Extension; Ab/Lower-Back Extension

### Ab/Lower-Back Extension

Lie flat on your back with the band wrapped under the bottom of your feet. Grab the bands and hold them at your hips with your arms fully



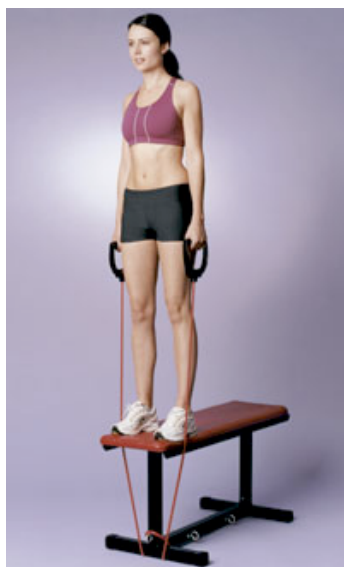
extended on the floor. Keeping your arms and legs straight, jackknife your arms and legs up until the body is in a V position with just your upper buttocks on the floor. Push back down to full, flat extension on the floor. (Note: A more resistant band places emphasis on the lower back; a lighter band makes the abs work harder.) Do two sets of 30 to 50 reps. **Bench Press**

Wrap the band around the back leg of the bench. Lie with your back on the bench and your feet on the floor. Hold the handles with your elbows bent and your hands in line with your chest. Press your arms straight up until your hands are over midchest. Lower and repeat.



### Two-Leg Squat

Secure the band on the bench; holding handles, stand on the bench with arms straight down at your sides. Feet should be shoulder-width apart, chest over midfoot, hips back, knees behind toes. Maintaining body position, sit back and down for a three-second count until you get to a quarter-squat position. Pause for a moment, then pushing through your midfoot, drive upward to full extension as fast as possible. This three-seconds down, pause, up-fast should be one continuous movement. Repeat.



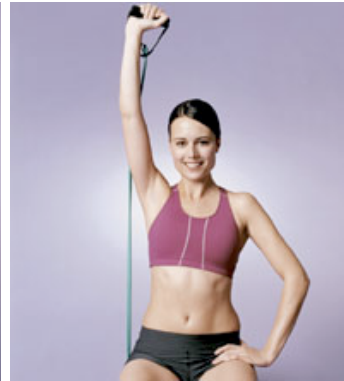
### Shoulder Press

Sit on the bench with the band secured under the front leg of the bench. Hold the handle in your right

hand and bend your right elbow 90° so your hand is near your shoulder. Press your arm straight up so your bicep is close to your right ear. Lower and repeat.

### **Biceps Curl**

Stand on the band and with your arms straight down, palms facing out, and shoulders back. Bend your elbows to curl



forearms up until your hands are shoulder-height. Keep your back still?don't sway. Return your hands and arms to the starting position and repeat.

### **Jumping on the Bandwagon**

Why this plan works for runners

Three years ago, Tommy Sheehan, director of strength and conditioning at Columbia University, heard about Movement Training Systems (MTS), a band-training workout adopted by the men's basketball team at Metropolitan State College in Denver. By focusing on building stability, agility, and strength, MTS claimed to provide athletes with a full-body workout that had more direct carryover to their sport. MTS uses high-intensity drills that teach muscles to respond more efficiently with better balance, speed, and power.

Sheehan went to Denver to see MTS for himself, and was so impressed that he decided to test it at Columbia, starting with the men's basketball team. "After four weeks, the guys moved faster, jumped higher, and just played better," says Sheehan, who has since introduced it to the football, swimming, tennis, and track-and-field teams. "The coaches were sold."

Word of the innovative program spread, and others at Columbia joined the MTS bandwagon. "The band workout is incredible," says Gene Schafer, a marathoner and athletic trainer who worked with Columbia's basketball, cross-country, and track teams for five years and now trains clients with bands at ARC Athletics in New York City. "The bands build strength, keep athletes injury-free, and don't interfere with their main activity." Schafer says that the basketball players who used the bands didn't complain of the pain or soreness they had after their typical weight-room workouts.

Athletes respond so well to band training because it's an active way to build strength. The bands put constant tension on the body, which produces a challenging cardiovascular workout.

Also, the resistance provided by the bands doesn't overload joints as can a too-heavy dumbbell or weight plate. As a result, there's less risk of injury, more work that can be performed in a single session, and faster recovery between workouts. "Your knees, shoulders, and back won't hurt the next day," says Sheehan. "So there's minimal impact on your running."

Several of the exercises in the band program require a balancing act—multiple muscles working simultaneously to perform a single move. "The bands work on synchronizing the lower body and upper body, which helps provide core stability, balance, and muscular power—all things that can improve a runner's performance," Sheehan says.

Although MTS hasn't been officially adopted by Columbia's cross-country teams, other runners have found success with it. Triathlete Jim Bolster, head coach of Columbia's men's swim team, shaved a minute off his 10-K time after starting to train with Sheehan twice a week. Since then, several of Bolster's running buddies have latched onto the routine. "The bands provide a great cross-training workout," Bolster says. "It's also less intimidating. I know I'm not going to overextend or hurt myself so I push myself harder than I would using weights."

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