

Runners hit their stride with Feldenkrais

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With Sunday's New York City Marathon in the rear-view mirror, many runners are already renewing their vows to speed workouts, strength training, and [yoga classes](#) for next year's race. Meanwhile, a handful are quietly practicing an off-the-radar method for pain reduction and better alignment called Feldenkrais.



Although it's just catching on with mainstream marathoners and weekend warriors, some elite running coaches are already familiar with Feldenkrais, primarily thanks to the late Feldenkrais practitioner Jack Heggie, who wrote [Running With the Whole Body](#) in 1996. In fact, Feldenkrais shares much in common with the holistic bent of the barefoot running trend: it encourages you to listen to your body and run naturally, as opposed to trying to force your body to run in ways deemed "correct" by coaches, podiatrists, or shoe manufacturers.

The odd-sounding practice (named for its founder, the Israeli scientist Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais) helps runners—and civilians—function more efficiently "by bringing awareness to movement patterns," explains Anat Meiri, a certified Feldenkrais instructor and administrative director of the [Feldenkrais Institute of New York](#)'s training program. "We help people develop new patterns that are healthier, more organic, and more efficient," says Meiri.

Pearlman got pain relief — and arches — after just a few Feldenkrais sessions

Many of Meiri's clients are athletes or dancers seeking to enhance their performance, but Feldenkrais (about \$100 per session) is equally effective for those suffering from debilitating pain—particularly the kind that Western medicine hasn't been able to help.



“The majority of people I’ve seen have already been through the whole medical establishment and they just don’t feel better. So they try us,” says Jae Gruenke, founder of the [Balanced Runner](#), a Feldenkrais practice that works with runners of all stripes.

Pain was what drove me to see Gruenke—specifically, a strained hamstring that hurt even when I walked. During our sessions, I would lie down while Gruenke gently moved my limbs in a sequence of very small movements—guiding my bent leg in a small circle, for instance—or cued me to initiate the motion. Both techniques, I learned, were designed to teach me to use my whole body when I move—meaning that a movement that originates in my foot, say, travels all the way up to my head rather than ending at my pelvis.

Given that the practice is so subtle, I didn’t expect the almost-immediate changes to my body: more length in my neck, more breadth across my pelvis, and arches like tunnels in my previously flat feet. And within a few sessions, the pain was gone, which Gruenke says is typical for most of her clients. But if your aim is to improve your form or time—say, for next year’s marathon—she recommends starting sessions as early as possible. “Not surprisingly,” says Gruenke, our busiest month is August.” —*Nina Pearlman*

Anat Meiri leads [group](#) \$20 (class card available) and private sessions at the [Feldenkrais Institute of New York](#), 212-727-1014, [www.feldenkraisinstitute.com](#)

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