SARAH YOUNG & GABE SKINNER

Breathing, Crawling and Getup Training for Runners

[SARAH] This discussion is about breathing, crawling and the getup exercise for runners; how important it is for runners to learn how to breathe properly and the mechanics behind that; and how crawling and doing a Turkish getup can help.

My name is Sarah Young. I teach running and work with runners in Michigan. I am an active isolated stretching practitioner, a bodyworker and have a Master's in Exercise Science.

I'm here in Washington DC with Gabe Skinner. I met Gabe in 2008 at a summit of the most advanced active isolated stretching practitioners in the country.

I remember telling Marjorie Brook, who's an amazing massage therapist and body worker, how I was impressed by Gabe's presentation, with the quality of questions he asked during the course of our summit, and with his techniques. Gabe is the type of guy who wants to keep learning, growing and getting better—refining his technique so he can better help people.

I lost track of Gabe, and then about a year ago came to DC to work with him. Again I was impressed with what he did with the Functional Movement Screen (FMS), with active isolated stretching, and with other techniques he's incorporated, including his work with kettlebells.

Gabe, tell the listeners about your journey, how you got from point A to where you are now.

[GABE] Point K.

First, thank you very much for the kind words. I appreciate that. There were a lot of impressive therapists at that summit—you, as well.

In my background as a massage therapist, I started at a sports medicine clinic in 2006 as what you might call an osteopathically trained massage therapist. This entails techniques other than what people think of as classical massage. We did neuromuscular therapy, vibrational modalities… muscle energy techniques.

A lot of those techniques fall into the category of low velocity, so I'm not working outside my scope of practice. These are massage, but a lot more than what people usually think of as massage therapy. We're not getting pigeon-holed into sheets and candles; this is very different.

I split from that clinic last year , and that was when I came in contact with the Functional Movement Screen. I went to California to become certified with Functional Movement, where Mike Contreras was my instructor. He is very good. If you ever get a chance to take one of his seminars, take it. He's great.

That introduced me to a new world and a different mindset. I had a lot of skills in my tool bag that helped people with the first step of most therapeutic processes, which is to work on mobility.

Gray Cook reminds us to work on mobility before we work on stability. I think that's very accurate, but where do you go from there? What do you do with that mobility? How do you infuse motor programming or stability into what you've helped people achieve in their bodies?

There was a very good answer to those questions.

The natural progression from there is into kettlebells. I've had a great education from my coach Christine Norris, who works with Joe Sansalone at Optimum Performance Training Institute in Columbia, Maryland. I've been working and learning and trying to immerse myself in this whole new world.

[SARAH] I came to FMS and found it incredibly beneficial for the runners I work with. It amazes me. I think it was Gray Cook who said if a runner can't balance on one leg for 20 seconds, he probably shouldn't be running. I've come across some ultra marathoners who can't balance, and there are compensations that happen as a consequence.

Often in the runners I work with, the rib cage and diaphragm are not in a position for them to breathe well. Some of them don't understand why

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they need to do anything with the upper body or shoulders because it's the legs that run.

[GABE] Right…what do my arms have to do with running? What do my ribs have to do with running?

[SARAH] I've studied with Esther Gokhale and her method of posture and have worked with Dr. Mark Cucuzzella from the Natural Running Center. We've had a lot of discussion about posture and how important it is for runners. Mark's an amazing runner who can still do a sub-three-hour marathon—way under sub-three—and he's 46 years old. He has some of the same mindset as we do about what needs to happen.

After getting your okay, I talked with some of your runner clients about the work you've done with them. A couple will be running a half-marathon this weekend. One of them, Michelle, thought she had to give up running because of her knee. She'd had knee surgery and was told she couldn't run; it would be bad and she would lose all of the cartilage. Now she says, "My knee doesn't hurt. I even was able to wear heels and dance at a wedding." She's impressed.

[GABE] This is with no ACL in the left knee.

[SARAH] Right. The other person I talked to was Travis, who plays soccer. He never thought he would do much distance running, and now has the half-marathon bug. He's found with running and doing more fast work on the soccer field; he's considerably more stable and it's easier to make cuts. And when he's doing his long runs to prepare for the half-marathon, he has more fluidity and his stride is opening up more naturally behind him.

I also talked to a couple of other runners who say great things about what you're doing. If you could go over a little bit about what you do with the breathing, crawling and how you get into the Turkish getup and why that is so important to a runner.

[GABE] First, it's an incredible pleasure to work with folks who want to work, who are going to do the things I ask them to do, to do them well and to work hard at it. They make me look good.

We started from scratch with those clients. I did the first screen with them in January. Neither of them had done much in the way of resistance training.

Michelle's most recent recommendation from her physical therapist was to start running with weights strapped around her ankles, and that was the primary therapy.

We went through the first screen, and identified where we wanted to go with the corrective strategies and running prep. We started to work on that right away and quickly moved into training as they were ready. This happened rapidly.

They continued to use the FMS correctives to supplement their training. Breath is incorporated into everything we do.

Recently, I've heard others talk about the way the diaphragm functions. We have the diaphragm as part of breathing. By the way, this is breathing as something with purpose; we automatically respirate. We don't think about respirating. The body is always going to choose breath. In conscious breath is where the diaphragm is especially involved.

We have the breathing portion of training; we have the stabilization portion and we have movement there. We have to have command of and own our breath in all of the positions we do.

Breathing is a huge component of what I coach, but most especially in the Turkish getup.

It's nice to have a self-limiting exercise or a self-limiting tool that if you're not breathing and not optimally using breath, you're not making it up with load. You're just not accomplishing that first lift-off, and it's good to have instant feedback.

It's teaching people techniques about the diaphragm to use at home to aid in not only owning the breath in exercise, but also to own the recovery process after the exercise of turning on, a phrase I heard recently. We have to teach people how to turn on the off switch. I think that's brilliant.

[SARAH] Some runners teach a form of running called, Chi running. When working with

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the regular and Chi runners, I have them on the table and I might be starting an active isolated stretching session, when I ask them to breathe, the whole upper chest rises.

If you can't take a diaphragmatic breath when lying, when you're not doing anything but you're still breathing from your chest, it tells me when you're out running you're going to breathe from your upper chest too. If you're sprinting, you can do that, but if you're going to cover 13 miles or do a 10k, that's not going to work well. You're in 'fight or flight' mode.

I know you help people by getting that rib cage where it needs to be and implementing the crocodile breath. Why the crocodile breath? What is that and why is it so important?

[GABE] Crocodile breath came to me from Gray Cook. I can't remember which *Secrets* DVD, but it was one of the *Secrets* DVDs FMS put out. Crocodile breathing is easy in that it gives people immediate feedback. It gives them something to focus on other than breath. They can focus on the feeling of the low back, lifting and pushing the belly into the ground. It's a little bit more concrete in instantaneous feedback than just lying on your back. It's something people tend to grasp pretty quickly.

[SARAH] I view the diaphragm as truly the soft core with all of the connection points under the thoracic spine, the lumbar spine, the fibers that go into the iliopsoas and the transverse abdominis. It's all so crucial, but most runners I've worked with, especially the avid marathoners who tend to be Type A, think running is just about the legs.

That crocodile breath helps to get the thoracic spine open, which aids in the rotational stability we need for the running. It's also going to help with the FMS score if we get that a little bit more open. Most people are locked in that closed thoracic position.

I've suggested that runners need to do crocodile breathing for five minutes in the morning and five minutes in the evening. At first, they'll say it takes too much time. Afterwards, they'll say they want to do more. It's so relaxing. It just brings them down.

[GABE] It's the thing nobody wants to start, but once they start, they don't want to stop.

[SARAH] "Laying down on the ground and breathing is not going to do anything for me."

[GABE] "I have so much more stuff to do. I have more important things to do now."

[SARAH] Getting people to start doing the breathing is important. I know you use crawling, too, along with the breathing and the getup.

[GABE] Yes. Geoff Neupert and Tim Anderson have done a great job introducing us to the rolling, crawling and all of the things that happen for cross-patterning. There are lots of reasons to do these techniques. If you want to learn more about it, reference their material.

There are a lot of other organizations that include rolling and crawling—Gray Cook and a many others. There's a lot of great information about that online now.

[SARAH] Often, when working with my runners on posture, they lose posture when we work on how to walk or how to swing their arms.

Sometimes if I get them crawling—crawl forward, crawl backward—when they stand up, posture immediately improves. The ears are over the shoulders; shoulders are over the hips; hips are over the ankles. Generally the body is much more aligned.

[GABE] Absolutely.

[SARAH] They're much more in touch with the core.

[GABE] Absolutely.

[SARAH] Whether you're a sprinter or an endurance runner, you should be running from the core.

[GABE] And a neutral spine…absolutely.

[SARAH] First, we have runners doing crocodile breathing. We have them crawling forward and backward. There are all variations of crawling to evolve into, but the basic crawling we did when we were babies is good.

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Take that, and then go into the Turkish getup. In each one of those steps, what information does this offer a running coach about the athlete, or to the athlete about themselves, and what they can learn from that?

[GABE] It's the breathing that teaches people how to connect themselves to the core. The core is a very global thing including the lats and glutes. We continue the process of connecting the lats and glutes through the thoracolumbar aponeurosis using the crawling.

We're a continuation of one piece of tissue from one lat all the way down to the contralateral, the glute, and vice versa on the other side. Crawling teaches how to connect and use that sling—the posterior core sling—as it represents a viable pattern of propulsion, a method of propulsion that the body can use in a very stable place.

Once you understand that connection inside the body, we use the Turkish getup to reinforce it. There are so many benefits to the getup, but that is certainly one of them. It's cementing that connection you've started to build between the breath, core slings, and then movement and load.

[SARAH] I was trading email messages with Bob Schroeder, a physical therapist in Miami who also works with runners. He was talking about all of the different things the getup does.

Hip mobility uses the asymmetric stepping patterns so crucial to gait. The weight bearing increases ability of the core to run for longer periods. Additionally, gravity works down on people, because we all tend to slouch after awhile if the postural muscles aren't holding us up. In the getup, we go from the cuddling-the-kettlebell position, to rolling over, to going to post and going to the elbow, and then to standing.

I had some people try it and say, "Oh, that's nothing," because they sit up and crunch it rather than crossing over. Have you found that?

[GABE] Absolutely. Again with the breath, if you're not pressurizing the diaphragm, you're not creating that soft core-inner core stability. People try to lift the shoulder blade and I'll say, "You're not going to be able to crunch that weight up." They clasp back, and both feet splay out.

[SARAH] That straight leg starts popping up. It takes a lot of core strength to do it right.

Packing the shoulders, working on the crocodile breath, as well as breathing and getting the rib cage position on the floor and then transferring that to the getup, moving the getup with the rib cage in the right place and the breathing patterns with the diaphragm—this all translates to running.

A lot of runners don't see any benefit of doing anything other than adding mileage, but running is mostly a sagittal plane exercise. What's beautiful about the getup is it takes us into all the different planes of motion.

[GABE] It covers every functional movement the body does, all in one big chunk. Each part of that whole is another little sliver of the human movement people do, and all those slivers make the whole pie of the getup.

[SARAH] If you look at the fascial plane, anatomy trains or whatever you want to call them, you see the shoulder connects over to the hip. If you don't have that stability at the shoulder, it's going to cause issues down the line.

The getup will help with shoulder stability, which will give the hips stability, so you won't be trying to get all the stability from one place. You said the core is not just the abdominals. It's not just the glutes. It's how everything moves together and stays together in keeping that solid core you can rotate around when running.

Tell me a little bit more about how you introduce the Turkish getup, each step of it and what you see it offers to runners.

[GABE] There is a considerable amount of excellent material about the getup coming from others. We have Dave Whitley teaching it. We have Gray Cook, Brett Jones and Mark Cheng. We have lots of good source material to…

[SARAH] …and the man, Dan John.

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[GABE] Yes. These guys have all gone into depth and I highly recommend people check out the material to dive into the getup.

We were talking about the cross-patterning and what I think it can offer runners. During going from post to elbow in the getup, you're connecting one glute to the contralateral lat as you push off the foot and pull yourself up onto the elbow.

We see that connection in crawling. If you're crawling well, you're probably walking well. If you're walking well, it's possible for you to run well. You're creating the foundation upon which running can be built.

From there, you're going to the straight-arm position. With that you have to have a good pack of both shoulders. It's sort of continuing that solid pack and understanding what that is—where posture has to be in order for the shoulders to be packed.

From there, you again have that pull-through. That is the continuation of the same glute-lat connection we started with in the beginning. You have to maintain a very stable and packed shoulder while everything else is moving. The getup is a great exercise.

The next position moves through the hip rotation segment. That's a mobility check. The Turkish getup is as much an assessment as it is a useful exercise. You see the hip mobility is either there or it's not.

This is where we get into the gold, especially for sprinters, where the shoulder girdle is stacked on top of the rib cage, which needs to be stacked on top of the pelvic girdle in the presence of a squeezed glute in a single-leg stance. That half-kneeling stance is very representative of a single-leg stance.

Where do runners live?

[SARAH] In single-leg stance. Whether you're sprinting or doing a 10k, a 5k or a marathon, you have to have that strength.

[GABE] It builds the core integrity, structural integrity and solid platform from which you can snap up, push off, pull yourself up with that front leg and get into the lockout. That lockout is a nice practice of the neutral spine—everything solidly stacked on top of everything else.

[SARAH] And then you're standing with a kettlebell over your head.

[GABE] I've heard the kettlebell overhead described as a big noggin, like what babies have. Babies have a disproportionately big melon on top of their shoulders, making the center of gravity higher.

As we get older, we get more normal portions—most of us anyway—and the center of gravity drops down toward the pelvis, toward the belly button. We lose that innate ability to essentially train the core.

The kettlebell overhead represents a higher center of gravity—a heavier and higher noggin, which is where you're using the center of gravity to open the core. You have to stabilize around that weight.

[SARAH] And it's going to help you balance when you come back down from the getup. It takes a fair degree of control, mobility and balance, so you don't go—BAM!—down on a knee when you come back down. You control that weight going back through all of the positions to get back down on your back without losing control.

[GABE] Great point. It's not just doing the getup. It's doing the getup well. It's doing it with control, making it look effortless, having the distinct parts all blend together into this beautiful whole. I've heard it described as like yoga, but with resistance.

[SARAH] Kettlebell yoga.

[GABE] Make it look graceful. Make it look good.

[SARAH] I was at a Bob Taylor and Charlie Weingroff workshop in Niles, Michigan, that was wonderful. Somebody asked, "At the gym where I work, I teach an ab class. How do I incorporate this with what you're teaching?" The lecture covered crawling and a lot of the DNS stuff. Bob said, "Do you want an ab workout? Do you want a core workout? Have them do the Turkish getup for an hour."

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[GABE] An hour.

[SARAH] And he's right. If you did that, you'd have to work hard because you can also break it down. You don't have to go from lying, cuddling it, taking it over, and standing up. You can just keep working that post-to-elbow, post-to-elbow, post-to-elbow.

[GABE] Absolutely.

I work with a runner who is recovering from a mastectomy and reconstruction. That's a long recovery period. There's a lot of residual scar tissue, but she's still trying to run, although she runs very slowly.

We've been working on the getup. She can't do all of the getup, but she can get up to the half-kneeling stance. We practice doing one part of it over and over. You can pick parts to work on. I find it's a huge benefit to whatever the weakest part is, so that's where I tend to focus.

For her, it's pulling through with the left arm. The left arm is the down hand. We do each step—so it's the cuddle through the post, to the elbow, to the straight arm, to the pull-through, back down to the pull-through, back down, then pull through again, back down, elbow and return on the back.

[SARAH] I look at the Turkish getup for endurance athletes, too, or anybody who just wants health and fitness.

It's similar to what Phil Maffetone talks about with slow weights. It's definitely a slow-weight exercise. The whole idea of focusing on form versus doing a bunch of weights where you're going to drive up the heart rate and keep it at a high level for the entire time. You'll probably get sloppy.

If you work controlled and focused, your heart rate will get up there a little bit as you move through it, but it's more of a mindful technique. It's kind of a Zen thing.

[GABE] A Zen thing. Absolutely.

[SARAH] There are correctives you can use to help people loosen the shoulders, loosen the neck—doing the arm bars, the screwdrivers.

If somebody does a straight-leg lift, the leg may not go up as high. You put that kettlebell in the opposite hand with the arm outstretched. Then have the person bring the leg up, now there's more core firing and that leg generally goes up higher. That's a great illustration. It shows people where the weak points are.

Maybe my core is not that strong, because if I'm lying on my back and I can't bring my leg up in a straight-leg raise at least to 90 degrees. Now you hand me a kettlebell and I can do it, something is not turning on in my core, and I need to learn how to access that. Turning the core on in a very true essence is what the getup offers.

[GABE] It's sort of like an assist for the core.

[SARAH] It's like feedback, like I have this big kettlebell, and the kettlebell is going to teach me. Pavel has said the kettlebell will teach you if you let it. If you're holding that weight over you and you try to come up but don't have the shoulder packed, you're going to know pretty quickly because you're going to start shifting all over.

[GABE] The other side of that could be what Brett Jones calls "the fullest expression of the form of the Turkish getup." You can't stimulate that fullest expression without load; loading it brings out the full expression of the form of the getup. I find that very interesting.

[SARAH] But, ah grasshopper! Sometimes you just need the water bottle in the hand to work that balance.

[GABE] Or the cell phone. That's been a valuable thing. I've seen people do the naked getup with a shoe. Nobody cares if they drop a shoe.

This is usually in the first session or two when they don't know me very well. I cut a very intimidating figure, by the way.

[SARAH] Yeah, right.

[GABE] I give them my cell phone. I have rubber flooring, so nothing is going to happen to my cell phone, but they don't know that. I give them my cell phone and have them balance my cell phone

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on the fist. It's an excellent teaching tool, much more effective than a shoe they don't worry about dropping.

[SARAH] For other people—for me, I'd say, "If he's stupid enough to put that on my hand, he's going to lose a cell phone."

[GABE] So be it.

[SARAH] This conversation has been good because what I often find is runners don't think they need to weight train. They don't want anything to do with something remotely like a weight. There are a lot of people doing kettlebells and other things who think running more than some sprints might be a little crazy.

Running doesn't have to hurt, but a lot of people are plagued with running injuries. Depending on the research you're looking at, you can see numbers from 65% up to 80% of runners who are injured every year.

Doing things like the getup, like crawling and getting the diaphragm and the rib cage where they need to be can go a long way in helping with a lot of those injuries.

And, don't forget doing the Turkish getup barefoot.

[GABE] Ahhh, the foot. Yes, indeed—that short foot.

[SARAH] And training the short foot, so when they go out for a run, the foot knows what to do. The foot knows what to do and how to balance the body with that weight overhead.

[GABE] Absolutely.

[SARAH] To wrap this up, we've gone over some great points of why breathing, crawling and getting up is good for runners, whether they be sprinters or endurance runners.

If somebody doesn't know who to go to, we've mentioned some names. How can people find the proper sources for the kettlebell and the Turkish getup?

[GABE] You have to be careful about who you're trusting with your body. Find a good mentor—a good trainer, a good coach, a good therapist. There's a broad spectrum of people to choose from, but find somebody who's very knowledgeable.

They should know and be versed in the work of people like Gray Cook, Mark Reifkind and Dave Whitley. Brett Jones is an excellent resource, and Mark Cheng. There are a ton of good resources—trainers should be familiar with these people.

[SARAH] What is the kettlebell series Brett Jones and Gray Cook have out? Is it *Kettlebells From the Ground Up*?

[GABE] *Kettlebells From the Ground Up*, yes.

[SARAH] It's an amazing resource with a lot of the breakouts and corrective exercises that are explained exceptionally well.

[GABE] Those folks work very well with Pavel Tsatsouline's organization, StrongFirst. Any of the StrongFirst guys or the RKCs. Strong First is Pavel's new organization and is an excellent resource. Those are trainers you could look up by certification and say they have a very strong foundation in the Turkish getup.

[SARAH] Great, Gabe. It's been a pleasure.

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