

# Fiona in Focus

**After years of running, and with an unorthodox style,  
my body needs rejuvenating and a rest from running,  
but only for a while -- I hope**

By Fiona Green

As runners we all have our ups and downs, our peaks and our valleys, our kinks and our quirks. There are days when we feel great, days when we feel below par and days when we can't even remember what par feels like.

It has been a while since I have experienced that spiritual zen-like feeling where I've been floating along effortlessly like a gazelle, my feet barely touching the ground. These days I feel more like a portly water buffalo, not a young energetic one, but one of the senior members of the herd who is content to watch the youngsters play and stand on the sidelines and talk about the good old days.

It wasn't difficult to figure out the reason for this change; the inevitable effects of aging, imperfect biomechanics and muscle imbalance. At several races over the years, fellow runners have kindly commented on my unusual running 'style.' They rarely use the word gazelle or cheetah but have focused on the fact that my left leg "flails out to the side, like a windmill."

Research has revealed that the cause is likely tight hip flexors caused, among other things, by prolonged periods of sitting, repetitive running and little to no cross-training/stretching.

At one point 20 years ago, a sports 'medical expert' mentioned that I had one leg longer than the other (or was one shorter than the other?) and actually suggested that I consider finding a different sport! Somehow through sheer grit and determination I have managed to make things work and had some great running experiences in the process.

Recently, however, my imbalances, inflexibility and imperfect body caught up to me in the form of a general tightness in the glutes, which has made running almost impossible for the past few weeks. I realized it was time to take action and opted to refrain from running and sample some of the classes offered at my local gym. My goal was simple -- to transform myself through stretching and strengthening and unleash the buff gazelle that lay within. We all have our dreams.

While running has always brought me a certain sense of pride and accomplishment, yoga is a humbling experience that exposes my numerous weaknesses for all to see. My first yoga class was relatively small with only five participants for whom yoga was clearly a way of life. They showed up with matching yoga socks, mats and wore special yoga pants that highlighted their lithe, fit bodies. They did not groan or wobble their way through the exercises but executed each move with poise and purpose, channeling inner peace through their movements.

As I tried desperately to follow our instructor, shocked by the uncoordinated figure in the mirror before me, I marveled at how everyone else was able to copy her effortlessly while my body remained rigid and unyielding, creating an element of chaos in an otherwise tranquil haven. After twisting and contorting ourselves into various poses, including downward dog, warrior 1 and pigeon pose for 40 minutes, we earned the chance to relax and rejuvenate and were encouraged to gently melt into the mat as the music soothed us into a state of rest. It was indeed relaxing, so relaxing that I actually fell asleep for a few minutes and awoke wondering why a strange woman was talking in my room. On the plus side I had finally found a yoga move I could do!

It is clear that after 35 years of running, adding flexibility to my stiff, wooden body will take more than a few yoga sessions.

I decided to try a barbell class. Every week as our delicate Pilates group filed out of the aerobics room, the barbell group would take over. Wielding their heavy weights and wearing a look that said "don't mess with us," they looked like a force to be reckoned with. I had always secretly admired their badass attitude and promised myself that one day I would join them. The day had arrived.

As it was my first class, I opted to start with light weights so I didn't injure myself or anyone who might be in my way. This was a wise decision. While some of the exercises were relatively easy, others revealed yet more weaknesses of which I had been hitherto blissfully unaware.



Looking around, I noticed that although many women in the class were smaller than me, their weights were twice as heavy. I reminded myself that, like yoga, this was not a competition but yet again being the weakest link was tough!

My third class was PiYo, which sounded like a cool blend of Pilates and Yoga. Unfortunately the title was misleading and the class was relatively fast paced, consisting of a series of movements that involved twisting, contorting and jumping in rapid succession. It was around this point that I started to feel my age. While I could easily keep up with the cardio aspect of the class, my inability to process and emulate the moves in a timely fashion meant I was always two steps behind and was sacrificing form in an effort to keep up.

As I twisted and squatted, lunged and planked, my mind wandered outdoors to the park where I should have been running and I realized I needed to work out my kinks as soon as possible so I could get back to doing what I love. I am hoping it won't take too long!