

**Achilles**<sup>TM</sup>  
INTERNATIONAL



**MEMBERS & VOLUNTEERS  
HANDBOOK**



Achilles International welcomes all people with disabilities who want to participate in mainstream athletics. We are best known for our running programs, offered by local Achilles Chapters throughout the world, and our participation in races and marathons. Studies have shown that a regular running program can be an important factor in improving health, energy, and self-esteem.

Our local chapters are run by Achilles members and volunteers, who generously give their time and energy to recruit participants, organize workouts, and secure funding.

These are the people who make our organization possible. In fact, our volunteers are an important part of the Achilles experience. They share the journey our members make, from the first efforts in running, to participation in races and marathons. It's an important process and relationship, and one that helps disabled athletes begin to build the confidence to endure and succeed. It's not unusual for members and volunteers to forge strong friendships and volunteers are often surprised at how inspiring it is to watch a disabled athlete become simply, an athlete.

## **Membership**

### **Becoming a Member**

Membership in Achilles International is free and includes coaching, workouts, chapter tee-shirts, and our quarterly newsletter, "The Achilles Heel".

To join, complete the membership application found at the end of this document, or download the application from our website. Fax the completed application to: 212-354-3978, Attn: Membership, or mail to:

Achilles International  
Attn: Membership  
42 West 38th Street 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10018.

The majority of our members join one of our many chapters located in cities and towns around the world. To find the chapter nearest you, call 212/354-0300, or check the list located in the "Chapter" section of our website. If there isn't a chapter in your community, and you'd like to start one, download our "Achilles Chapter Handbook" from our website. If you are ready to start a chapter, download our Chapter Agreement document from our website, and fax to: 212-354-3978, Attn: Chapters, or mail to:

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Achilles works with members in-need to provide access to specialized services and equipment.

As part of the Achilles community, we will:

- Help you acquire the special equipment you might need for races and marathons
- Provide you with an Achilles guide for workouts and for marathons
- Send you notification for special racing events both nationally and in your area

### **Getting Started**

First, we'd like to note that in Achilles parlance, running means many things. It means conventional running, of course. But it also refers to walking, wheeling, hopping, or swinging through crutches. In other words, any form of locomotion that gets you through the route.

The most important item for runners is a good pair of running shoes. Special clothes aren't necessary; just wear loose, comfortable clothing that's suitable to the weather. Don't be concerned if you're a novice runner, or out of shape. You'll notice improvements quickly. Remember, speed is not important. Some Achilles athletes move slowly, others very fast. No matter what your speed or ability, our goal is to help you build strength and confidence in your ability, and to have fun doing it.

Our local chapters meet at least once a week and most of them will have coaches or experienced Achilles runners or volunteers who will give you assistance and answer questions. We encourage members to work out more than once a week in order to build their endurance and develop a comfortable running style. While this may sound daunting at first, you'll find that the rewards of time spent running with friends is significantly greater than time spent being sedentary.

### **Workouts**

The goal of each workout is to provide a meaningful aerobic experience, which is to get your heart rate higher, which improves the efficiency of your cardiovascular system. The result will be increased energy, sounder sleep, and a faster metabolism.

How fast should your heart rate be during aerobic exercise? Subtract your age from 220 and take 70% of that. This will give you the appropriate pulse rate, plus or minus ten beats. If you are a beginning runner and are unsure how long or fast to run, one rule of thumb is the "talk test." If you're not able to talk while running, you're going too fast or running too long. Remember, slower and longer runs are more physically challenging and more beneficial than faster short runs. The key is to build endurance.

Before a workout or race, your group will spend a few minutes warming up with a series of stretching exercises. When your muscles are relaxed, you're less likely to encounter injuries or strains.



Workouts last 30 – 90 minutes and every runner is encouraged to participate at whatever level of running, walking, or rolling is comfortable and appropriate to their ability. The goal is to increase your endurance and strength to be able to run 20 minutes without stopping. Joining your chapter for regular runs will bring noticeable improvements to your stamina and running abilities. However, if you plan on entering races, you should try to augment those workouts by getting out at least three times a week.

### **Races**

Participating in a race is a goal for many beginning runners. In addition to the fun and excitement of the experience, runners experience a great sense of personal achievement. Many Achilles runners, after experiencing several small races, make the decision to run a marathon. This takes a much larger commitment of time and effort, but is extremely rewarding.

To begin, choose a short race, such as a 2 mile or 5-K. Your chapter will be able to provide you with a list of upcoming races. Planning ahead is essential. Give yourself adequate time to train, and set realistic goals. While for some, this may mean finishing under a particular time, for many, completion is a sufficient goal.

Nerves are common before a race. Even the best runners suffer from them and second guess their ability to complete the race. Just remember to start slow and wait until you've hit a comfortable stride before you pick up speed. The experience of participating in a race should be an enjoyable one, and the most valuable reward you'll get for crossing the finish line is a sense of accomplishment and confidence.

### **Running Tips**

Avoiding injury while running or racing is critical and it's equally as important to enjoy yourself while you run. Here are some tips to help you:

- Start with a good pair of running shoes to properly support your feet.
- Get socks specifically made for running. Cotton socks can chafe and lead to blisters.
- A race day isn't the time to try out those new shoes or new clothing.
- Use a lubricant like Vaseline to keep socks and clothing from rubbing and chafing.
- Don't compare yourself to others. Run for yourself and set your own goals.
- Progress comes in fits and starts, but it comes. There will be some tough days, but there will also be great days. Focus on the great ones.
- Hydrate. Make sure you drink water throughout the day.
- To feel the best after a run, make sure you eat and drink in the hours immediately after your run.
- Don not run two hard days back-to-back
- A package of frozen peas makes a great icepack for aches and pains.
- For races longer than 5k, start out slower than you think you should
- It's OK to take walk breaks and there's no shame in walking.



## **Volunteering**

### **Becoming a Volunteer**

Volunteers are an important and vital part of the Achilles community and, as such, take on key roles. Some of our volunteer duties are:

- Helping disabled runners become familiar and proficient with special equipment
- Participating in weekly or bi-weekly workouts
- Providing guidance and running advice during races and marathons
- Helping out with race-day logistics

While their general role is to accompany disabled runners during the course of a workout or race, on any given day an Achilles volunteer will function as a member's eyes, ears, guide, and motivator. But ask any Achilles volunteer why they do it, and you'll hear the same answer, over and over: they get back as much as they give, and more.

To become a volunteer with Achilles International, complete the volunteer application found at the end of this document, or download the application from our website. Fax the completed application to: 212-354-3978, Attn: Volunteering, or mail to: Achilles International Attn: Volunteering, 42 West 38th Street 4th Floor New York, NY 10018.

As a volunteer, you can work with one of our many chapters located in cities and towns around the world. To find the chapter nearest you, call 212/354-0300, or check the list located in the "Chapter" section of our website. If there isn't a chapter in your community, and you'd like to start one, download our "Achilles Chapter Handbook" from our website. If you are ready to start a chapter, download our Chapter Agreement document from our website, and fax to: 212-354-3978, Attn: Chapters, or mail to: Achilles International Attn: Chapters 42 West 38th Street 4th Floor New York, NY 10018. If you'd like to be a volunteer guide during the ING New York City Marathon, contact us at the phone number above.

### **Working with Achilles Disabled Athletes**

Achilles members have a wide range of disabilities and a wide range of symptoms. When you are assigned to an Achilles runner, don't be afraid to ask them what their disability is; at what level they're running; what special equipment, if any, they use; and how you can best help them or be of assistance. They will let you know what pace they're comfortable at and what they expect of you. Do pay special attention to runners with balance or reflex problems so you can help them avoid falls or collisions.

Disabled runners may use many types of adaptive aids and equipment, such as tethers, braces, crutches, prostheses, and wheelchairs. They may also carry special medications, such as heart medication, asthma sprays and diabetic kits. Make sure you inquire what your running partner's



special requirements are and how you can help. If you are partnered with a runner with special equipment, ask your partner or the chapter leader to explain the equipment and help you become familiar with it.

### **Volunteering Tips**

- Know the running course and what the hazards or challenges are to that course.
- Ensure that your running partner has a means of returning home.
- Provide encouragement and positive feedback. Your job isn't to help the Achilles runner increase endurance or speed. It's to ensure that he/she has a positive experience that they can feel good about.
- As a volunteer, you're not expected to provide anything except running companionship. If anything else is requested, bring the issue to the Chapter leader
- Try to run with different partners in the Chapter and not with one person exclusively
- If you are running in a park with vehicular traffic, or on public roads, be cautious of car traffic
- If your runner becomes tired, encourage him/her to walk for a while or take a short break
- Be prepared for the "unk unks," or unknown unknowns. Carry a cell phone, some money, and a few energy bars. Anticipate issues, such as having an extra pair of crutch tips.
- Be careful not to lose your athlete. It may sound funny, but water stops, bathrooms, and fast wheelchairs on downhills all present challenges.