Augustana Cross Country Running Tips

1. **Stretching**. Be careful when stretching. Never stretch muscles if you haven't done a good, thorough warm-up. After exercise, do some light stretching but use common sense and don't pull hard on muscles. Stretching too hard can in fact easily lead to injury.
2. **Warming up**. Start your warm-up 40 minutes before the scheduled race start. Jog easy for 15 minutes, so your muscles get really warm. Performing some very light stretching exercises if you so wish. Get your gear ready, go to the bathroom and grab a last drink. 15 minutes before race start, do 3-4 strides of about 1 minute. As an alternative, you can also try 2-3 strides of 2 minutes in length. Start easy and gradually work yourself up to race pace. Walk slowlyfor 2-3 minutes between each stride. Time this so by the time you have done your strides, there are 10 minutes left until race start. At this time, coaches and runners meet close to the race start for a final "pep talk." Now we are ready for a great race!
3. **Racing**. When the gun goes off, you will notice there is usually a rush for the first few minutes. In most cross-country races we do (especially men's races), a majority of the runners go out way too fast, and as a result they fade significantly at later stages the race. Resist the temptation to go out at a pace that is too fast. You will not gain anything if you run the first few minutes at a pace significantly faster than you are used to. In fact, you will lose time overall, because fatigue will set in sooner than if you had gone out at pace you are able to hold for most of the race. Smart runners run these races at a fairly even pace, and as a result, they pass many, many runners who have gone out too fast and are dying. You can run smart too. Start the race at a reasonable pace, and finish strong. The opposite approach is very discouraging - nobody likes to be passed by a pack of runners at the end of a race, so be smart.
4. **Specificity of training**. This simple principle means that your training should be similar to the races you are preparing for. Cross-training (biking, swimming, skiing, etc) will not make you a faster runner. In order to become good at cross-country running, we need to perform a fair amount of running on our excellent ski trails. We will do some track workouts as well, because the track makes it easy to monitor running pace and coaches can get benchmarking results from each runner, which will help in providing good coaching.
5. **Nutrition**. Keep a good diet. Stay away from very fatty foods and junk food. Carbohydrates are important - Pasta, potatoes, beans, rice and bread are good sources for carbohydrates. You don't need to eat very much meat, but it's a good source for protein. Fish and chicken are great and are fairly low fat. Especially the day before and the day of a race, too much fat in the diet can lead to stomach problems during the race. For race preparation foods, stick to what you know works well for you. Stay well hydrated, and use water. You should not drink a lot of sports drinks or power drinks before races - they do not help you much for the race, but do you use them after the race - that's when they work best. After each run you do, you must get some food in you within 30 minutes - the sooner the better. Bread, granola bars, bananas are great post-workout snacks, and this will help your body recover fast. If you don't eat anything for hours after your run, your recovery can take a more than a dozen hours longer than it should. This means you could be far from being recovered when you go for your next run. Bottom line - make sure you have snacks available after training runs and races.

6. **Sleep**. It is very, very important that you get enough sleep. 8-9 hours is highly recommended. Your body performs a lot of very delicate healing only while you are sleeping. If you don't get enough sleep, you simple will not recover very well and you might find your race performances are disappointing and your body feels sluggish.

7. **Injuries**. Please communicate to the coaches if you are noticing unusual pain. Sometimes, it's possible to prevent an injury from getting really bad by immediate treatment, whether it's icing, taping, change of shoes or surface. The coaches have plenty of experience with injuries and they are worth talking to if you are worried about injuries.

8. **Clothing**. Running clothes are designed to be light and moisture-wicking. Avoid cotton, because it will not wick moisture well and can cause chafing. For training runs, wear wind-proof clothing on cool days, and make sure you wear a hat and gloves if the weather is miserable. However, don't overdress in a race. You can usually run in shorts and a sleeve-less shirt if the weather is 7-8 degrees and above. Having an extra coat and long, warm pants will, during the race, heat you up more than you need, and in turn this will force you to slow down. Try and dress as light as possible - you will warm up more than you think once the race is on. If there is a cold wind, you could run the first while with a light, wind-proof coat, which you later toss to a team mate or a coach as you start to feel really warm.

9. **Shoes**. The shoes we run in are the most important piece of gear we will ever use. Make sure you get good shoes, that fit you well. Running shoes have a lifespan of only about 800 kilometers, at the most. That isn't very long, actually. If you plan on using spikes this season, make sure you get used to running in them early on. Spikes can give an advantage on a slippery course, but do not feel you have to buy spikes if you have never used them before. It's possible to run very well in regular running shoes too, and we can also help you put machine screws into your regular running shoes, in case any of the races we do has a tricky surface. In this case, you should bring an older pair of shoes that you don't mind "wrecking" - the screws will make holes in the soles of your shoes, but it can be worth it if you get good grip during the race.

10. **Stride rate**. An efficient stride is important. To check your current stride rate, to count the number of times your right foot lands during one minute of running. Repeat the one minute runs at different speeds from an easy jog to interval speed. If you run like an elite runner, you will find that your stride rate is 90 or more per minute (180 steps) and is similar for various speeds. If your stride rate is less than 90 then make a conscious effort to increase the stride rate. To do this, concentrate on quicker, lighter, relaxed steps, but do not change the way your feet strike the ground. You also must maintain your stride rate when running up hills by adjusting the stride length. If you let stride rate slow down you will find that fatigue sets in and it is harder to get back to the desired stride rate once you are over the crest of the hill.

11. **Breathing patterns**. For racing and hard workouts, the 2-2 breathing rhythm works well: breathe in for two steps and breathe out for two steps. The 2-2 breathing rhythm means you will take about 45 breaths (assuming you have a stride rate of 90) per minute, which gives you a good depth of breathing. Most runners will use 2-2 breathing during most of the race, but you may find you need to breath even faster towards the end, the 2-1 breathing pattern - breathing in for two steps and breathing in for one step. If you find yourself breathing 2-1 early on in a race, your goose will be cooked soon unless you slow down! For easy runs - a 3-3 training pattern works well here. If you start getting into 2-2 breathing early on during an "easy" run, chances are you are going too fast!