

# Running through a pandemic: The early morning runner

After running for 40 years, tips for running in the age of COVID-19

**Lynn Deutscher Kobayashi**  
Columnist

TORONTO — With nearly four decades of distance running under my belt, I have some stories; running 23K in the Klondike Road Relay at 2 a.m. with reports of a grizzly bear on course, running 10,000 feet above sea level in Ethiopia and crossing the finish line of the Boston marathon nine minutes before the bombs went off in 2013. And now, running through a pandemic.

I've been a daily runner for the greater part of my running years.

While I started as a fitness runner, I discovered that I was "born to run" and went beyond my original fitness goals to compete, peaking as a competitor in my late-40s and early 50s.

During this time, I set a 30K national record at the Hamilton Round the Bay, set an Ontario age-group record of three hours and 10 minutes that stood for six years, placed third in my age-group at the Boston Marathon, and first at the Chicago Mara-

thon. In training, I ran up to 170 kilometres, 11 to 12 times a week. Those with more natural ability might get by on less mileage, but being able to log mega-miles without injury was one key to my success. I was able to run for nearly 30 years injury free.

Marathon training at this level required tenacity and an ability to stick to a plan, come rain or come shine, but never with the constraints imposed by COVID-19.

Since retirement, I've had the luxury of running at any time of the day, and my routine has been to run after the morning rush hour or in the early afternoon.

However, heading out for a run at my usual time in the first

are as important to me as the physical. Quickly, I had to revert to early morning runs to be able to be able to run stress-free.

There was a time when I would wake at 4:45 a.m. and get out the door at 5:15, for up to 10 miles of running before work. Drawing on those memories, I'm getting out the door just before dawn.

At this time of the year, that means getting up a little earlier each day. I have looked ahead and see that I'll need to head out the door around 5 a.m. by the time summer solstice comes around.

Most people must be enjoying sleeping in for a change as early mornings have never been quieter than they are now.

I am often the only person in Trinity Bellwoods Park, a known hotspot for social distancing violators.

But I do maintain more than two metres from the skunk that I see regularly grazing in the outfield of the park's ball diamond.

It really is quite a lovely feeling these mornings. And while I highly recommend the pleasures of this unusual quiet, I am hoping that few people will be converted to the habit.

Despite only seeing a handful of people while out in the early morning, there have also been frequent episodes of being



PHOTO COURTESY: LYNN DEUTSCHER KOBAYASHI

Columnist Lynn Deutscher Kobayashi running the Boston Marathon 2007 - 400 meters from the finish line.

overtaken by faster runners and cyclists, who think speed gives them the liberty to pass by with little room to spare.

While there are many sites like Mountain Equipment Co-op, with advice on how to exercise

outdoors safely, 'but what's needed as well is a cyclist and runner's version of the Skier Responsibility Code.

Here's my adapted version.

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# Stories from a mountain town: The God in mochi



What's not to love about the soft, squishy pillow of deliciousness?

**Caroline Ishii**  
Columnist

OCHI, Japan — I love mochi. What's not to love about this soft, squishy pillow of deliciousness? I know I am not alone. What is it about mochi that people love so much?

I've had a lifelong passion for food. I was born into it, with a mother and father who loved food. My mother was an excellent home cook, who made delicious Japanese food. My father's experience as a short-order cook when he was young made him very quick at making breakfast.

Sitting down at the kitchen table in the morning, out would come a complete breakfast with eggs, fried potatoes, bacon, toast, and porridge before I could say that I didn't feel like breakfast.

Food made my parents hap-

py. To cook it, eat it, and most of all, to share it with others. In a household that wasn't open with feelings, food was the closest to saying, "I love you."

My mother and I disagreed on many things growing up, but we both shared a love of Japanese food. Often when I eat mochi and other Japanese food that my mother loved so dearly I think of her. I imagine we are sharing the food I eat while I am here in Japan.

### What is mochi?

Mochi is made with short-grain glutinous rice. Traditionally mochi was made during mochitsuki, the rice pounding festival.

The hot steamed rice is placed in a stone or wooden mortar and pounded with a wooden hammer until it becomes a soft, sticky dough and made into round mochi cakes. Most mochi sold these days are made by machine.

Fresh mochi can be enjoyed

cured and is typically used for cooking in a wide range of sweet and savoury dishes.

### The history of mochi

The first mochitsuki occurred after the birth of rice cultivation in Yamato, in the Nara Prefecture on Honshu Island, during the Yayoi period (300 BC – 300 AD). Red rice was the first variation used in the production of mochi and eaten exclusively by the emperor and nobles.

During the Heian period (794-1192), mochi was used as a 'food for the gods' and in religious offerings in Shinto and Buddhist rituals. Besides general good fortune, mochi was also known as an omen for happy marriages.

The tradition of eating mochi at New Year's began during Japan's Heian period (794-1185).

The nobles of the imperial court believed that long strands of freshly made mochi symbolized long life and well-being.

References to mochi can be found in the oldest Japanese novel, *The Tale of Genji*, written around 1,000 A.D. by Murasaki Shikibu, a novelist, poet, and lady-in-waiting in the Imperial court.

Mochi became popular among the Japanese and an easy-to-carry source of energy for farmers and samurai, especially during winter. The sound of samurai pounding mochi was a sign that they were about to go into battle.



PHOTO COURTESY: CAROLINE ISHII

A sampling of some of the many different types of mochi treats columnist Caroline Ishii has encountered while in Japan.

### The spirit of mochi

Mochi isn't merely a food, it has inadama or spirit. The Japanese culture, through Shintoism, believes in *yaoyorozu no kami*, meaning there is a god or spirit in everything.

From a seedling to an ancient tree, from your sweater to your shoes, and from rice grain to mochi. Therefore, we need to respect and have gratitude for all that is around us.

Since ancient times, Japanese

society has depended on rice harvests for their survival and have a deep respect for rice and its spirit. Wasting rice is still considered a great sin in Japan today.

### Celebrating with mochi

Growing up in Toronto, I was introduced to mochi by my mom as a traditional food for Japanese New Year's Day.

Kagami mochi (mirror mochi), a stacked pair of rounded

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rice cakes topped with an orange, was placed in our home to welcome the new year deities. In the morning, we would eat ozoni, a traditional hearty soup with mochi cakes.

Later we would have osechi ryori, the traditional new year spread for good luck, which my mother prepared all week.

Living in Japan, I was surprised to see all the different kinds of mochi. There are special mochi following the seasons and accompanying special occasions. Here are just a few of the many:

**Sakura mochi** starts appearing in stores with the arrival of spring. This is a pink-coloured mochi filled with anko and wrapped in a pickled cherry blossom leaf.

**Ichigo daifuku** is a strawberry covered in a thin layer of anko and enveloped in mochi. The two have now become some of my favourites in my mochi repertoire.

**Hishimochi** is eaten on Hinamatsuri, Girl's Day or Doll's Day, and celebrated on March 3. Hishimochi resembles a layer cake with its sections of red, white, and green mochi and is cut into diamond shapes.

**Kashiwamochi** is eaten on kodomo no hi or Children's Day on May 5.

A national holiday in Japan, families celebrate the happiness of their children by flying carp-shaped streamers and eating kashiwamochi, a mochi with anko or a white miso paste filling



PHOTO COURTESY: CAROLINE ISHII

Mochi is sold in almost every food store in Japan, and there are different types of mochi for different seasons and celebrations.

and wrapped in an oak-leaf.

**Daifuku mochi:** Translated as big belly rice cake, this mochi is regarded as a bringer of good luck. The soft round mochi cakes are often filled with anko or white bean paste.

They come in white, light green and light pink colour and two sizes: mini and regular palm-size.

**Botamochi:** While daifuku fills mochi with other ingredients, botamochi is the other way

around: mochi is the filling inside other elements.

Classic botamochi uses a firm adzuki paste packed around the small ball of rice cake.

*"Mochi is a small gift of deliciousness from the gods. There is the spirit of rice in every mochi, bringing us energy, blessings and love."*

**Oshiruko /Ozenzai:** A soup of sweetened azuki beans with pieces of mochi. In winter, Japanese people often eat it to warm themselves and it is believed to drive away illness.

**Yatsushashi:** One of the best-known local food products of Kyoto, these are fresh mochi triangles with a cinnamon flavour, wrapped around anko.

**M o c h i - gashi** are traditional sweets that look like mochi but are made without rice, and instead use starch or wheat flour.

**Dango** is a dumpling that looks and tastes like mochi but is made from mochiko (rice flour), and not glutinous rice.

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fact that I get to play a character I looked up to so much is a literal dream come true!

**NV:** The cast of the show is a diverse group of young girls, what do you think is the importance of having diversity in film and television?

**MT:** I think diversity and inclusivity is so important. It's very meaningful for younger generations of all backgrounds to see representations of themselves on the screen and in the story.

*The Baby-Sitters Club* also breaks many stereotypes, and promotes respect for other cultures. This can be applied to real life for our generation and beyond!

**NV:** As a young Japanese Canadian, do you feel connected to your Japanese Canadian identity? What are some of the ways you embrace or celebrate your heritage?

**MT:** My parents are immigrants and they established friendships with other Japanese people when they moved to Canada. My family friends have been there since I can remember and we often gather and celebrate many of these events together! Some things we celebrate together are: *Mochitsuki* - making mochi *Omisoka* and New Year's (with *Toshikoshi* soba noodles and osechi!)

*Hinamatsuri* – Girls' Day *Kodomo no Hi* - Children's Day *Nagashi somen* - somen slide (such a fun way to eat noodles and cool down on a hot day!)

**NV:** What are you up to during



PHOTO COURTESY: DA COSTA TALENT

During the quarantine, Momona Tamada keeps busy by doing her school work, dances and bakes.

this quarantine? What are some of the ways that you stay busy, active or entertained?

**MT:** Everyday I do some schoolwork and try to fit in some workouts, even though I prefer dancing with my friends!

I also bake AT LEAST once a week, go on walks, watch tons of Netflix and do pretty much anything that will keep me entertained.

**NV:** Like Lara Jean from *P.S. I Still Love You*, you're an avid baker and cake decorator. Where did you learn to bake and are you creating anything in the kitchen during the quarantine?

**MT:** I have always helped my mom in the kitchen since I was two years old. I always loved watching my mom bake and cook. The first time I baked and decorated a cake by myself, I was five! I took a baking lesson when I was six, I remember I was so proud and happy.

During this time I have made all types of goodies like angel food cake, cookies, cupcakes, donuts, churros and crepe cake... to name a few!

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Look out for Momona Tamada in *The Baby-Sitters Club* on Netflix in late 2020.



PHOTO CREDIT: DR. JONATHAN ETO

Eriko and Ju of Izakaya Ju in Markham's J-Town.

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sary when the pandemic struck and have been reduced to pick-up and UberEats to spread their delicious food.

"We have lost many customers come to eat regularly. We have been making efforts to let customers know we open for take-out but we assume that most of customers enjoy not only our food and also the atmosphere like Japanese IZAKAYA," explained manager Eriko Yamamoto.

When asked how they are trying to stay positive, she replied, "Owner chef Ju is always thinking what customer needs. He is the happiest and can stay positive when customers are happy to eat our food. So thinking of customers happiness and create new dish is most important to stay positive."

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Like mochi, dango is eaten all year round, and there are many varieties.

One of my favourites is shiratama, a small mochi dumpling often used as a topping on desserts.

I love shiratama dumplings on top of matcha ice cream parfaits with anko and kakigori shaved ice with matcha syrup and anko.

The pairing of mochi with matcha and adzuki is for me, a match made in matcha heaven!

Mochi is also used in a wide range of savoury dishes, from hot pot dishes like nabe and oden to chikara udon, where a toasted mochi is placed on top of the udon noodles and broth. It is also often toasted or grilled and eaten in a variety of ways, depending on the region and family preferences.

Modern mochi creations have become popular in North America, such as mochi ice cream, which are small balls of ice cream wrapped inside a mochi covering, in a variety of flavours such as coffee, chocolate and mango.

Now I have a craving for mochi and will go out to buy some. Lucky for me, it is sold in almost every food store in Japan, even in my small town.

Mochi is a small gift of deliciousness from the gods. There is the spirit of rice in every mochi, bringing us energy, blessings and love. No wonder it continues to bring happiness to so many. Japanese soul food is great for these challenging times and for all seasons.