

Running and Training Methods

It may come as a surprise to the new runner to discover that there are numerous training techniques, and even among coaches there is no clear consensus as to which is the best one to follow. There are, however, only a few variables to consider when running: **time, distance, and intensity**, other factors such as terrain or geographical location should also be considered. What works for one person may simply not work for others, focus your energies towards what is best for **you**. As long as you follow a few guidelines, there are endless possibilities toward attaining your training and running goals.

The purpose of training is to teach the body how to deal with the physical and mental elements of running for time and distance or even the Marathon. Training runs and workouts should balance themselves between comfortable and uncomfortable in order to develop the different aspects of your mind and body. Running the Marathon distance involves much more emotion and adrenaline and requires the runner to operate close to the edge of exhaustion.

Here are a list of different training methods which can be used to improve your general fitness and your ability to train better. To minimize the risk of injury, it is important to first develop a base level of aerobic running for several months before attempting some of the more challenging training methods. Then, slowly add one to two workout sessions during the week while trying to maintain the same weekly mileage. To give your body adequate time to recover, leave two or more days in between harder workouts. Generally, it is not necessary to do more than two sessions a week at a faster pace in order to see training gains.

Jogging is really a form of very slow running in which you normally place only minimal stress on your cardiovascular system. You may be exercising at a heart rate of 100-120 beats per minute, and you should have no difficulty in holding a conversation as you go along. It acts as a good prerequisite or aerobic base before normal running is undertaken, and you may find it beneficial in the training week following your first hard race. Obviously, it does not elicit the same training response as faster more competitive running, but millions of people find it a very enjoyable pastime.

Long, slow continuous running refers to running long distances at a comfortable, slow pace albeit slightly faster than jogging speed. During this type of running the muscles are working aerobically (with oxygen) and your heart rate will be approximately 130- 150 beats per minute. You will be working at only about 60-65 percent of your maximum oxygen uptake or VO₂max. Finally, your breathing should be reasonably comfortable: you should not be gasping for breath.

Medium Pace Continuous Running is a compromise between long, slow distance running and fast, continuous running. Your heart rate will be approximately 140-160 beats per minute and you will be using 70-75 percent of your VO₂max. Although you will be breathing more frequently and to a greater depth than during long, slow continuous running, once again you should not be gasping for breath and you should be able to talk while running.

Alternating Fast and Slow Continuous running is where the first mile is run at a fast continuous pace (example: 6-7 min pace), followed by an easier second mile (example: 7-8 minute mile) then another fast mile, and so on. If you are practicing on a track, this is roughly equivalent to covering four laps. This is harder training and should be undertaken only when you are fully endurance-trained. You should select the distance you want to cover carefully, bearing in mind your own level of fitness. This type of running can be a preparation for fast, continuous running.

Fast, Continuous running is probably the hardest type of training and should be done only when you are fully fit and in small amounts because of the fatigue you will encounter. With this sort of running, the heart rate is approximately 160-180 beats per minute and more fast-twitch muscle fibers are being recruited requiring you to use 80-85 percent of your VO₂ max.

Interval Running (endurance or aerobic) is where comparatively short distances are run. For example: 400 meters at 70-85 percent of your top speed over the distance with short recovery periods of about one-two minutes in between runs. Naturally, the fitter you are, the shorter the recovery periods can be. However, you must not run the repetitions at full speed as this would involve your anaerobic threshold.

Interval Training to develop aerobic and anaerobic simultaneously (speed and endurance) involves the intervals being run at 90 to 95 percent of your top speed over the training distance, but with longer recovery times being taken between the intervals, you may either walk or jog slowly during the recoveries. As with interval running for the aerobic system, you should gradually increase the number of intervals you can do. Do not do more intervals if you are slowing drastically or struggle in your recovery.

Repetition running differs from interval training in terms of both the length of the interval run and the duration of the recovery time between intervals. It involves repetition of longer distances with, after each one, a period of allowing almost complete recovery, during the recovery phase the heart rate should drop to well below 120 beats per minute. The repetitions may be one to two miles long, and should be run at a long, fast pace to duplicate the stress encountered under faster running conditions. As the pace is higher than in fast, continuous running, you should only do a few repetitions. You can use this type of running as preparation for fast, continuous running.

Fartlek or Speed Play is an informal type of training consisting of alternating fast and slow running. It is considered “unscientific” in the context of the true interval training. Essentially, you combine slow, continuous running, medium-paced running,

interval running, hill running, fast, continuous running, sprinting, and walking without involving any rigid structure in terms of intervals, running rates, and recoveries. Nevertheless, a session of Fartlek running can give you a reasonably hard and satisfying workout, and one that you can easily enjoy doing in pleasant surroundings. This type of training is preferably done over a natural surface such as golf courses, grass, or in woods where varying and uneven grounds can be encountered. It allows for a certain freedom from highly structured workouts, and many world-class endurance runners find it a refreshing change from these.

Hill running can be done in two ways: either you run a series of repetition sprints up a hill with recovery periods between, or you can select a course containing several varying hills and run it on a continuous circuit. By doing the latter type of training, you are able to use a large percentage of your VO₂max as you run uphill, something that would be more difficult to achieve while running on the flat. You obviously need to be fully fit before you go in for this type of training and even then you should take care to introduce it in the right amount. You will find it strengthens your legs as well as your heart and lungs.

Time Trials can either be at 'race' effort or running trials aimed at achieving a pre-determined time. All-out time trials are usually run over a shorter distance than a runner's actual competitive distance, and they can form a valuable part of training if a runner cannot attain top-level running events. A good time trial may act as a psychological boost if done several days or weeks before a major competition assuming, of course, that the run goes well. It is important also to set time goals that are **realistic** to the athlete's fitness level. It is necessary that the athlete appreciates that the time trial is not just a fitness test, but can act as a guide to suitable future training. The time trials can be structured to cater for testing one or more energy systems.

Differential running is where the training distance is established and the athlete runs the first half of the distance at a comfortable pace, and then accelerates to run the second half as fast as possible. There may be a three to four seconds differential in the times taken for the first half and the second half of the run. This type of training can help simulate the end of a race by teaching an athlete not to slow down even when he or she is getting tired.

Acceleration sprints involve gradual increases in running speed from jogging to striding to sprinting in distances of 50-120 meters.

Interval sprinting involves alternating sprinting with jogging. For example, sprinting 50 meters, and then jogging 60 meters for distances up to about 5,000 meters.

All of these different training methods may seem confusing at first. As with most things, however, the more you practice, the easier they will become. There is a wide array of books, magazines, and online resources that can help you learn how to train and race smartly. Do not be afraid to experiment until you find a system that works for **you**. Keep in mind that training programs are only as good as the person who is applying them. For the new runner, **less** truly is more, and **quality** is always more important than quantity.

Remember that you have started on the **Long Run of life**, and the journey should be pleasurable and make the trip worthwhile.