

Running Training – How Hard Can You Push It?



Do you train too hard? or not enough?

Did you win last years UTA100? Are you leading the Sydney Trail Series? Did you run 2:02 at Berlin? The guys/girls who get these top results are masters at training hard, but even better at managing their bodies and remaining injury-free. The vast majority of runners get injured every year, meaning prolonged periods of enforced rest. How can you make sure you keep yourself in the uninjured camp?

Q: How hard should you train to get the best results possible?

The answer to this question is actually very simple, but applying it successfully is VERY difficult.

A: As much as you can without breaking yourself (getting injured)

Bear in mind though, that the single biggest contributing factor to people getting injured is doing too much, too soon. It is a fine line to tread, so you need to tread it very carefully.

Unsurprisingly, there isn't a magic one-size-fits-all figure of how much running is safe. Elite ultra running athletes train up to 250km per week, but most people wouldn't last one week of this regime without sustaining an injury.

The other tricky part to the "how much is too much" question is that it is a constantly changing figure. If, for example, you train consistently for a whole year with no interruptions, your body will become stronger and you will therefore be able to tolerate, and benefit from, an increased level of training. Likewise, if you have a 3 month break from running, your muscles, tendons and bones will have lost strength and density and you will therefore need to resume running at a lower volume and intensity than you would have happily coped with 3 months earlier.

There are a few golden rules which you should try hard to stick by in order to minimize being one of running's many casualties.

1. The “Little and Often” principle

Your body will cope a lot better with regular short runs than long infrequent runs. For example, if you were to run 50km in a week. The hardest way for your body to cope with this would be doing the whole lot in one go. If you are not used to running big distances, a training run like this would probably cause enough trauma to your body to require several days, if not more, of rest. Too much rest (as discussed above) is not good for your running. Splitting the 50km up into 5 runs of 10km would be much easier on your body.

The figures I am using are a fairly dramatic example, but the principle applies to any volume of running. If you have struggled with injuries or niggles in the past then try to break your training up into more runs. That way you may well be able to keep up a good overall volume, without the niggles.

2. Make sure your technique is as efficient as possible

There has been a huge amount in the press in recent years about running technique. Seeing a good running technique coach who is able to assess how your body functions (stability, flexibility etc) as well as improving your running technique can make a real difference to your running. It helps reduce the likelihood of sustaining injuries, which leads to more consistent training and therefore improved performance.

3. The “10% rule”



Don't increase your weekly mileage by more than 10%

Keep a diary of your training and make sure you don't increase your total weekly “volume” by more than 10%. By “volume” I am referring to either the total distance or to the intensity of training. If, for example, you are adding hill repeats or 1km repeats or “speedwork” to your training for the first time, then this should be considered to be the 10% increase, and you therefore shouldn't increase the distance as well.

4. Vary the terrain / surfaces you run on



Vary your surfaces to stay injury-free

If possible, try and vary your runs during the week. Do some on the road, some on the trails, run on grass or the beach for part of a run if you can. Varying the terrain helps to reduce the repetitive load on your body. Having more than one pair of shoes to train in can also help with this. The small intrinsic foot muscles, as well as your calf muscles and Achilles tendon will be subjected to a slightly different load in different types of footwear, so it is helpful to have two (or more) pairs on the go at any one time

5. Listen to your body

This is an age-old cliché, but it has stood the test of time for good reason. It works! If something hurts when you are running, then don't ignore it. Especially if it lingers for more than a few days. If possible, get it diagnosed by a health professional who runs. No one understands a runner's body (and psyche) as well as a fellow runner. You will be able to resume training much quicker if you understand your injury and know what you can be doing to help your recovery.

6. Add a simple “Body Maintenance” routine to your training regime

The routine that works best will vary from person to person. Some people may have tight hip flexors, others tight calves, others may have gluteal muscles which don't function efficiently. It is a great injury prevention strategy to undergo a biomechanical body assessment, and implement a stretching and strengthening regime which is specific to you. It doesn't need to be elaborate, and it should be easy to implement into your daily routine. Just like running, your body will adapt best to a maintenance routine on a “little and often” basis. Click [HERE](#) for an idea of what your Body Maintenance routine could include.

Follow these rules and stay injury free. Not being injured will make running a whole lot more fun and it is the best way to improve your performance.