

How to Increase Your Running Speed and/or Distance

My Views On Training (from classes, podcasts, and articles I've read)

You first need adequate mobility (in big toe, ankle, and hip flexors) and good form (running tall, 180 steps/min) before training to increase your speed and/or distance. Trying to race a car with a damaged frame and bad transmission usually doesn't work so well! As a rule, due to excessive sitting in the modern world leads to the "lower cross syndrome. The calves, hip flexors, and quads tend to be strong and tight, and need to be stretched. The glutes and hamstrings, however, tend to be weak and neurologically "disabled", needing to be activated and strengthened.

Use a foam roller, rolling pin, Lacrosse ball, and/or a Theracane (and myofascial massage) to loosen up muscle and fascia, pushing into tight sore areas and figuring out how to move them so that you pull on the tight, sore area. Yes it hurts, but it is worth it, and you can choose your level of discomfort! Less pressure more frequently yields almost the same result as deep pressure. Also practice your form, and get the feedback of a friend or use a video to observe yourself. Once you feel you feel that you're a solid runner, the following drills and exercises should help increase your level of performance.

Increase Your Endurance by steadily increasing the miles you run/walk in a single session. At least every 2-3 weeks do a "long run" where you increase your usual time or distance. Make sure you also take rest days, and keep in mind that it can take over a year to fully adapt to an increase in training. Under an increased load, your body slowly builds more capillaries (to transport oxygen and waste products) and even increases the amount of energy-producing mitochondria in each muscle cell.

Plyometric Drills are explosive exercises that build the power needed to run quickly and efficiently. It is hard to reverse a bad habit, but practicing new exercises and drills that mimic running motions allow you to learn new movement patterns that can then be subconsciously incorporated into your running.

Fast repeats of a partial lunge, making sure your feet are pointed forward and your front knee tracks the middle of your foot encourage proper form. A, B, C, & D skips (see YouTube) train for fast and powerful ground contact. Explosive jumps (ankle, squat, 1-legged, box, & side-to-side) improve balance and increase power in your legs. Use good form and keep up the speed and power of each exercise.

Strength Training is important for increasing speed and maintaining good form and efficiency during endurance events. A single set of 8-10 reps at high weight (while maintaining perfect form!) is enough, and minimizes the wear and tear on your muscles. Strengthening training increases bone and cartilage density, and trains your body to recruit more muscle fibers during each contraction.

Focus on *eccentric* contractions (lengthening a muscle under load) to build more usable muscle and best helps re-hab an injury. For example, in a calf raise, come up onto your toes, and then *slowly* drop your heels back to the ground or off the back of a stair. Hamstrings and glutes can be worked on machines, with elastic bands, or with your heels on a large ball. "Clam shells", partial squats, climbing stairs, 1-legged squats, and lunges also strengthen the glutes. Also try various foot-strengthening exercises.

Summary: Put your energy into improving your form (flexibility, drills) and building endurance. When you seem to have reached a plateau (maybe once a year), take about 10-12 weeks to focus on running faster, doing hill work, or pushing to longer distances. Then give your body time to adapt to this new level of exertion!



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