

How to be a Distance Runner

I First, buy the right shoes. They are the biggest equipment expense for runners, so it's important to get it right. Spend wisely by buying well-made shoes from a major brand. Search out a model that fits you properly, and is designed for the surface you'll run on most often—roads, tracks, or trails. If you're not sure which shoe will work best for you, shop at a running-specialty store staffed by veteran runners and shoe experts. There are a couple of these in the area. After you buy your shoes, remember that even the best have a limited lifespan. Plan to replace them after about 350 to 500 miles of wear.

II Run safely at all times. The biggest threat you'll face as a runner on the road, by far, is the car. Traffic zips past you at just about a yard away. A moment's attention lapse from either you or the driver can bring disaster, and you'll be the one to suffer, not the well-protected driver. The best way to lower this risk is to avoid running on roads. But for many of us, this is a near-impossibility. Or it's an approach that adds time and complexity to our routine (if we have to drive to a park, for example). So most of us just learn to be extremely cautious when we run on the roads. We try to find low-traffic roads with wide shoulders; we run on the left side of the road, facing traffic; we obey traffic signs and signals; and we follow every road rule our parents taught us by the time we were 7. Every runner should run as if every car is a lethal weapon. **Because it is.**

III Run with a partner or with a group if possible. This has many advantages. Besides having a friend improves your safety, you learn quickly how fast the miles go by if someone is around to distract you. Having a partner also lends itself to slowing your pace. Use the "Talk test", that is you should be able to carry on a conversation while you run.

IV Running form is as individual as a fingerprint and is too inborn to change very much. But, with practice, you can make minor modifications to become a more efficient runner. Run "tall" and upright, not with a pronounced forward lean. Look toward the horizon, not at your feet. Run faster by increasing

your stride turnover, not by overreaching with each stride. On uphill, shorten your stride, and drive more with the arms. Try to maintain even effort, not pace. When running downhill, let gravity work for you by leaning slightly forward and lengthening your stride.

V Eat and drink the right foods. Sports nutrition is too big of a topic to cover thoroughly here. But, in general, the rules for good nutrition and fluid consumption are the same for runners as everyone else. Three areas of special interest to runners: (1) eat foods high in carbohydrates as they are the fuel for muscles; (2) eat lightly an hour before training and 2 hours before racing; (3) drink 8 to 16 ounces of water or sports drink an hour before running in hot weather, as dehydration can be dangerous.

VI Add a little stretching and strengthening. Running is a specialized activity, working mainly anything between the ankles and knees. If you're seeking more complete, total-body fitness, you need to supplement your running workouts with other exercises. These should aim to strengthen the muscles that running neglects, and stretch those that running tightens, which means strengthening the upper body and stretching the legs. Add a few minutes of strengthening and stretching after your running workouts, because that's when these exercises tend to do the most good.

.....and finally

VII Always believe that you're a winner. One of the great advantages of running is that it gives everyone a chance to win. Winning isn't automatic; you still have to work for success and the threat of disappointment is always present. But in running, unlike in other sports, there's no need to beat an opponent or an arbitrary standard (such as "par" in golf). Runners measure themselves against their own standards. When you improve a time, or increase a distance, or set a personal record in a race, you win--no matter what anyone else has done on the same day. You can win even bigger simply by keeping at it for the long haul, for years and decades. You don't have to run very far or fast to outrun people who have dropped out. It's the Tortoise and the Hare story all over again. Slow and steady always wins the race. Especially in the long run (pun intended).