

Your Training Toolbox

by [fetcheveryone](#), 19th October 2012

When I was five, I asked my dad if I could help him demolish a wall. He gave me a claw hammer which I swung with enthusiasm, and it bounced back and smacked me right between the eyes. We've all had that childhood moment, where we've wandered into the shed and started playing merrily with something that could easily knock you out. And if you're just starting out as a runner you need to show your tools the same respect.

Unfortunately, 'not running before you can walk' is an awkward analogy in this case – but as an apprentice runner you need to be comfortable with running on a regular basis before attempting anything more detailed. It doesn't matter how fast you are, your first job is to make running a habit. Once you're thoroughly addicted to running a few times a week, you can start filling your toolbox with different types of run that will help you improve your performance. Let's tool up!

Long Runs

Put simply, your long run trains your body to cope with running for as long as you need it to, whether it's your first 5k or a marathon. They give you the opportunity to test out fuelling strategies and also give you time to tackle your mental demons before you meet them head first on race day. The toughness you develop when running long can also help you cope with the intensity of the last half of a shorter, sharper race. But remember that this is distance training, not speed training – if you can't talk, slow down a bit. Although it can sometimes help to introduce a few sharper miles towards the end of your runs to simulate race conditions, take your time on your long run and enjoy exploring areas you don't reach during the rest of the week.

Rest Days

As soon as you start to push your body, rest days become important. In tool terms, it's leaning on your shovel drinking a cup of tea, whilst you turn things over in your head. In physical terms, it's called the adaptation phase. When you work a set of muscles hard, your body responds by growing extra capillaries in that area, to help supply them with oxygen, and to help remove waste products. So if you're feeling guilty about sitting on the sofa watching Ghostbusters, don't worry, because your body is busily tricking you out. Not only has running got you off that sofa, it's made you better at sitting on it.

Tempo Runs

When you run hard, your muscles produce lactic acid, which your body tries its best to clear away. Your lactic threshold is the point at which your body can't tidy up fast enough, and your muscles are overcome and struggle to cope. A weekly run at this sort of pace will train your body to handle the lactic acid more efficiently, to combat the feeling of fatigue when you run at speed. Warm up for a mile or two, and then build up the intensity until you're running at a speed where you find it difficult to talk. Three or four miles at this pace will do wonders, and a gentle jog home at the end will help you to recover.

Intervals

Like Tempo Runs, Intervals involve pushing your effort level – but instead of one continuous effort, they are broken down into smaller chunks of harder effort, interspersed with periods of recovery. As well as helping your speed endurance, they help to strengthen your leg muscles, sharpening up your ability to run at speed. The intricacies of choosing the right interval session is a whole box of spanners in itself – but whether it's 20 x 200m, or 4 x 1 mile, choose a pace that will see you run the final effort as fast as the first one, and don't forget to warm up and cool down.

Hill Work

You can tell which runners have done their hill training – they're the ones that seem to speed up on the hills whilst the rest go backwards. Running uphill puts different strains on your legs – your Achilles and calves are under more pressure as your heels land below the level of your toes, and your hip flexors work harder to lift your legs to higher ground. Training on hills will also strengthen your legs to improve your speed on the flat. If you're new to hills, maybe start by trying to incorporate a hillier route in your training every so often – but don't attempt K2 – a few minute-long climbs will help. Don't forget to include downhill running too – it's tempting to reach the top of a hill and then use the other side to recover, but it's the one time when the gradient is in your favour, so practice making the most of it, and recover on the flat.

Recovery Runs

Just as interval training helps your body to cope with the rigours of running at pace, recovery runs help your body to cope with running whilst fatigued from the previous day. They come into play when you want to run more than three times a week, when you can no longer afford the luxury of taking a day off after each session. Drop the intensity, wear your least sexy kit, take the dog, use it as a chance to help your Uncle Frank train for his first 5k. Have fun – it's about getting in a few miles to help your legs, rather than forcing anything.

If you've ever changed a plug with a dinner knife, or rewired a nuclear submarine armed only with a pair of tweezers, you'll know that the tools that help you reach your goals are many and varied. This isn't an exhaustive list by any means, but it'll get you started.