

27 Ways to Run Better Every Day
By Runner's World editors
Runner's World

Consistency is the most essential piece of every training program. It's the one thing—perhaps the only one—that every coach, physiologist, and medical expert agrees on.

Without consistency, you aren't going anywhere. You're not going to get faster. You're not going to run farther. You're not going to lose weight, lower your blood pressure, finish that marathon, or achieve your other running goals.

With a consistent training program, on the other hand, the sky's the limit. You'll feel better and run better every day. So let's get with it. Here are 27 ways to add more consistency to your running.

1. Run with others. To make sure you do a workout, there's nothing like the social pressure of knowing someone else (or a group) is waiting for you. Bonus: It's often more fun than running alone, especially if you're doing a long run, or a speed workout on the track.
2. Try something new. The fitness world is full of new and fun-filled events, and they don't all require a 3-week trip to Borneo and a survivor diet of grubs and lizards. Don't let yourself get bored with an endless string of 5-K and 10-K races. Cary Stephens, an attorney in Corvallis, Oreg., found himself drawn to "scrambles," an off-road running adventure. (To learn more, visit www.bigredlizard.com.)
3. Run like a tortoise. We can't lie to you. This isn't a sport of instant success and miracle shortcuts. Patience pays off, often in a very big way. At the beginning of a marathon training program, many participants can't imagine themselves running more than 5 miles. Twelve to 16 weeks later, voilà: the cheering crowd and unbelievable exhilaration of reaching a marathon finish line. Stick with the program. Repeat: Stick with the program. Prepare to be amazed.
4. Take a break. To every thing, there is a season. You don't have to run every day, every week, or even every month. Many top runners visualize their training year as a mountain range. It has peaks and valleys—recovery periods when they let their running taper off, so that they can build all the higher in their next training period. For healthy, consistent training, your body needs regular—that is, weekly, seasonal, and annual—recovery periods.
5. Eat a healthy breakfast. We can't emphasize this one enough. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, because it fuels you for the entire day. To skip breakfast or eat a skimpy one is like failing to rehydrate and refuel after a marathon. You wouldn't do that, would you? Well, your night's sleep is like a marathon to your body, because you don't get any fuel while you're sleeping. So carbo-load at breakfast. And add a little protein.

6. Get cozy with frozen vegetables. This isn't a nutrition tip. It's an injury-prevention tip. If London Marathon winner Paula Radcliffe can take ice baths after a hard race, you can stand a bag of frozen peas against your sore knees for 15 minutes. Nothing reduces inflammation and holds injuries at bay like ice. Result: You stick to your training program. Don't like veggies? Fruit works, too. Try a small bag of frozen blueberries or strawberries. Or one of the many commercial ice wraps, often with handy Velcro straps. (You can find a good one at www.contourpak.com.)

7. Find a coach. Maybe the kind who yells at you every once in a while. (But probably not.) Point being, a coach's first job is to motivate you in a way no one else can. Second job: To lay out your training program. Third job: To prevent you from straying from the program, probably by running too much or too fast. You can find a coach by asking around, calling running stores, and checking the Internet.

8. Join the "X" revolution. Despite the many proven benefits of cross-training, we still know too many runners who only run. C'mon, folks. We love running, too. We know all about the "specificity-of-training" rule, but we still skip the occasional running workout to get in some cross-training. Mainly strength training, bicycling, elliptical training, yoga, stairclimbing, pool running, rowing, and walking. Why? Not because we think these routines will make us faster in our next half-marathon, but because they make us fitter and less prone to injury.

9. Keep a log. Your training log is a great source of the kind of motivation that builds consistency. It beckons to be filled in, reveals the secrets of your training and racing successes, and provides lots of inspirational quotes and useful tips. At least it does if you're using the new Runner's World Training Journal, available at www.rodalestore.com. Check it out.

10. Enter races. You don't have to race to be a serious runner, but, geez, there are so many good reasons to enter races. Jeff Galloway, RW columnist, says that entering races, especially marathons, "scares" people into training the way they should. That's a good one. But we also like the sense of community you get from races. They help you realize that you belong to something big, and that there are more people than you imagined who share your running and fitness goals. Besides, it's good to go for the burn every now and again.

11. Pay attention to your shoes. Some things should be obvious, and this is one of them. But it's worth repeating, if it keeps even one of you from getting injured. Most shoes wear out after 300 to 500 miles. You often can't see the wear, but, your knees, hips, back, and Achilles tendons know it. Give your old, worn shoes to a local Salvation Army or similar group, and get yourself to a running-specialty store for a new pair. (While you're there, buy some reflective gear. The days are getting shorter. Make sure you're visible on the road this winter.)

12. Run early. You want to get something done? Do it early in the day. Everything gets tougher later in the day when various tasks and responsibilities start ganging up on you. In a recent Runner's World Online survey, the two most popular workout times were 5 a.m. and 6 a.m.

13. Practice good posture. Not just when you're running, but all the time. This is especially important if you've got an office job, and are sitting at a computer all day (like us). Make sure your keyboard and monitor are properly positioned, and sit straight but comfortably in your chair. Some of us have recently started sitting on those large Swedish exercise balls, which encourages good posture because you have to use your legs and stomach muscles to keep from falling off. Good posture can improve your running efficiency and decrease injury risk. Ergo, better consistency.

14. Use the fridge. In two ways. First, be sure it's always stocked with those key foods you rely on for healthy nutrition and snacking: sports drinks, low-fat yogurt, fruit, nuts, carrots, etc. Take your pick. Second, put something inspirational on the outside of the fridge: a picture of you and friends at a race, a training plan, a great quote.

15. Schedule it. You've got your Microsoft Office calendar, your PDA, your Day Planner, your napkin with the scrawled list of stuff you absolutely, positively have to get done today. Be sure to write in your workout. Carve out an hour in your day. The experts all agree: Your exercise is one of your most important daily activities. Make it happen. The President of the United States exercises almost every day. You should, too.

16. Subscribe to our free e-mails. We send out several free e-mail newsletters each week, and they're guaranteed to inform and inspire you. Go to www.runnersworld.com/newsletters, where you can pick the one or the several newsletters that most appeals to you.

17. Get your clothes ready. And your shoes. Root through your closets and drawers the night before a morning run to select and organize the running gear you need. Another good trick: Have a complete bag of running gear (and a dry shirt and towel) always at the ready in the trunk of your car. You never know when you'll be able to use them.

18. Run on different surfaces. See how many different surfaces you can run on in a week: Asphalt, gravel, trail, grass, track, treadmill, beach. Each stresses your leg muscles in a slightly different way, helping to prevent overuse injuries. (If possible, avoid concrete, the hardest and least accommodating surface for runners.)

19. Take a trip. Reward your training and racing successes with a special running vacation. Take in an exotic international marathon; many runners have had good luck with a trusted provider, Marathon Tours (www.marathontour.com), which can offer guaranteed entry into those difficult-to-enter events. Or, organize your running partners into a relay team, and enter an exciting and fun-filled road relay like Hood to Coast (Oregon), the Hana Relay (Maui), the Lake Tahoe Relay (California), the Cabot Trail Relay (Nova Scotia), or the Lake Winnepesaukee Relay (New Hampshire).

20. Stay flexible. We like that word—it has so many important meanings. Here, we're talking about a regular stretching program to keep your legs limber and injury-free. Or yoga and Pilates routines, both of which are enjoying a huge surge in popularity. Pick the approach that works best for you. You need to prevent injuries if you want to improve your training consistency.

21. Run before you get home. If you can't run in the morning or at lunch, at least try to run before you get home from work. Stop at a favorite park or trail on your way home from the office, and do a workout there. Or arrange to meet some friends for a run at 5:30 p.m. Once you're at home, it's hard to get out the door again for a workout.

22. Stay hydrated. Eat your fruits and vegetables. Get plenty of sleep. We know: You've heard all this stuff before. Okay, we'll stop. But just remember that the simplest, most basic advice often makes the biggest contribution to improved consistency.

23. Adopt a runner. Sometimes, the most motivating and rewarding thing you can do is to reach out to someone else. It could be someone close: at work or even in your family. Or your club might receive occasional calls from new runners, or those who want to begin. Offer to help. Beginners don't need a mentor with a Ph.D. They need encouragement, a personal connection, and the kind of basic training, nutrition, and injury-prevention experience you already possess.

24. Start a running streak. We don't mean that you should run every day like. In fact, we don't advise that for most runners. But we like the idea of running the same road race every year, like Jack Kirk, who has completed the Dipsea Race in Mill Valley, Calif., for 67 years in a row. Or you could run one marathon a year, every year. Or you could "collect" states by racing in a different state every year.

25. Join an online community. Many running Web sites, including ours, have forums or message boards where runners exchange information, opinions, and greetings that develop into digital friendships. Often, these blossom into "encounters," where the online friends agree to meet at a particular race. Along the way, they encourage each other's training, and lend a sympathetic ear when that's what you need most.

26. Establish a prerun routine. You warm up at the start of a race, and at the beginning of a workout, but it's also helpful to warm up for your warmup, so to speak. Follow a routine. Sixty minutes before your run, reach for a bottle of sports drink. At run-minus-30, get up and take a 3-minute stroll to loosen the legs. At run-minus-10, listen to a favorite psych-up song. Include any other short activities that work for you. Psychologists say these routines help us develop the healthy patterns we want.

27. Don't obsess about it. Hey, we wish every day went as planned, and every run fit perfectly into the scheme of things. But stuff happens. Life has a way of playing tricks on all of us, both the unexpectedly happy variety and that other kind. Don't worry about the runs you miss. Sometimes the best advice is simply to run with a smile on your face, and to enjoy and appreciate every workout. Come to think of it, that's always the best advice