

# 6 Tips for Mind-Body Running

By [Matt Fitzgerald](#)  
For [Active.com](#)

Your body can teach you everything you need to know to run better and find more fulfillment in your running. But you can only learn from your body if you pay close attention to it and if you understand how to interpret its messages and signals. In other words, you need to cultivate a strong mind-body connection to get where you want to go as a runner.

In my work, I am fortunate to talk to a lot of world-class runners about how they train and prepare to compete at the highest level. One thing I've noticed is that the mind-body connection is especially strong in most elite runners. We're used to thinking of superior running genes as being the factor that distinguishes the world's best runners from the rest of us. But I'm convinced that this highly developed mind-body connection is just as important. It allows them to learn more and learn faster from their bodies and then apply what they learn to their training and preparation in ways that maximize their improvement.

## **Train for Confidence**

Your body knows what it is capable of. Through training your body learns and continually relearns its performance limits as your fitness improves. It communicates this knowledge to the mind in the form of feelings of confidence (and lack thereof) in relation to the goals you've set. When you feel you are ready to set a PR, you are.

Trust your sense of confidence. Train in ways that maximize your confidence and minimize your doubts, even when doing so causes you to take the road less travelled and do things differently from other runners.

## **Run Happy**

The more effective your training is, the more you will enjoy it. Conversely, loss of enjoyment in training is one of the earliest and most reliable signs of overtraining. Having fun with your running is not a frivolous extra. It is vital to your mission to run to the best of your ability. Pay close attention to your level of enjoyment in training and don't be afraid to make adjustments when you find it waning.

## **Discover Your Magic Formula**

Each body is unique, and therefore each runner responds to training somewhat differently than any other runner. To realize your full potential as a runner you must discover your own personal magic training formula. This doesn't happen all at once, but rather step by step as you pay attention to how your body responds to training.

How much mileage can your body handle? How much high-intensity running? What sort of weekly workout routine works best for you? These are the kinds of questions that experience will answer when you listen carefully to your body. As each question is answered, apply it to your future training to make it more effective than ever.

## **Find Your Comfort Zone**

Comfort zones are often thought of as negative things that runners must escape to achieve their goals. That's true in one sense, but in another sense a comfort zone is a good thing. "Becoming a champion requires that you are comfortable when and where you are training," said Joan Benoit Samuelson, who early in her career turned down an opportunity to relocate to the running Mecca of Eugene, OR, in order to continue training on her own in her home state of Maine.

Being comfortable when and where you are training means sticking with the methods that work best for you, running in your favorite places and with your favorite people, and fitting running into your lifestyle in a synergistic manner. Being comfortable in these ways will help train hard, consistently, and with focus. Like confidence and enjoyment, comfort is a feeling. Pay attention to that feeling and let it lead your running in the direction it indicates, even when that means staying put, as Benoit Samuelson did.

### **Try Harder**

Suffering is a big part of running. The more suffering you can tolerate in races, the better you will perform. Some runners can tolerate more suffering than others, but all runners can increase their capacity to push through the discomfort of fatigue. Proven ways of doing so include regularly performing workouts that expose you to judicious doses of fatigue, aiming to beat your own best times in certain benchmark workouts, competing against other individuals in races and workouts, consciously rating your effort in races and key workouts, and getting motivation wherever you can.

### **Wing It**

The best-made training plans of mice and men often go awry. That's because training plans try to predict the future, and even the most carefully thought-out plans are never more than weather-forecast accurate in anticipating how your body will respond to the series of workouts you schedule.

So, by all means, plan your training, as it's a good way to get yourself started in the right direction. But be prepared to depart from the plan whenever necessary as you go. Each day, let your training plan have one vote for the kind of run you do and let your body--your feelings of fatigue and readiness, enjoyment, confidence, and comfort--have two votes. In other words, don't be afraid to wing it.

*[Active Expert Matt Fitzgerald](#) is the author of several books on triathlon and running, including his latest [RUN: The Mind-Body Method of Running by Feel](#) (VeloPress, 2010), [Runner's World Performance Nutrition for Runners](#) (Rodale, 2005) and his newest, [Brain Training for Runners](#).*