

Run Fast With Strides

- *By Jay Johnson | For Active.com*

Strides-short bursts of quick running that are typically completed in the middle or at the end of a run, or as part of a warm-up to a speed workout-differ in definition when compared to the term [stride](#) to describe a runner's unique biomechanics. "She has a beautiful stride," or "He has the perfect stride for the marathon," is not the way we're using the term in this article. In this discussion, strides are short distances run at race pace or faster. Strides can be done the day before a workout, done in the final minutes before a workout or done in the final minutes before a race.

Why Stride?

Sprint coach [Vince Anderson](#) never uses the term strides with his sprinters because he thinks that sprinters hear "strides" and they interpret it as "loaf." So the term "stride" may best be used for distance runners, for whom the term stride means running a short distance at race pace or faster.

Strides are typically 100 to 150 meters in length, but they can also be assigned as a duration of time. When using time, you could say 4 x 30 seconds at 5K pace with 60 seconds of easy running between the strides. So that's 30 seconds run at 5K pace, 60 seconds of jogging, 30 seconds at 5K pace, 60 seconds of jogging, 30 seconds at 5K pace, 60 seconds of jogging and finally 30 seconds at 5K pace. This is the assignment I give most of my adult runners the day before a workout. Why? Well, most of these runners are training for a half marathon or marathon, and when they run 5K pace, their neuromuscular system is reminded that it can work at paces faster than half marathon and marathon pace. There is a greater neuromuscular demand-[more motor units are called upon](#)-and there are biomechanical changes, either in stride length, stride frequency or both. Many adult runners become metronomes who can run marathon pace all day, yet can't run a 5K that correlates to their fitness.

How to Include Strides in Your Routine

Complete strides in the last third of an easy run, so if you run 45 minutes for an easy day, then do four strides some time after the 30-minute mark of the run. Strides are also important for workouts and before races. I like 3 to 4 strides to be the last part of the warm-up before a fast workout, and I definitely want to see people doing 3 to 4 strides in the final minutes before a race. Again, you want to "wake up" the neuromuscular system, making sure your body is ready for the demands of the race.

My college coach liked to talk about Basic Proficiency Maintenance days, or BPM days. This was a day where you ran an easy aerobic run to maintain a general level of aerobic fitness, but also a day where you ran some strides to maintain a basic proficiency at race pace. For example, a 1,500m runner may run 5 x 100m at 1,500m pace (with a 300m jog for recovery) just to make sure that he will not only be able to work out at that pace, but also to run that pace during a race.

For the high school track athlete or the collegiate track athlete, strides should be done on the track, and timed. There is not a 150m mark on most tracks, so coaches will need to use a measuring wheel and mark that spot inside lane one.

How to Run Strides Properly

Run with good posture, meaning a [1- to 2-degree forward lean](#). Your ankles should feel "poppy" and your arm action will obviously be more active compared to your slower running paces. For most runners, a stride feels like a fun, efficient experience. And there is some research to show that running at race pace will improve your stride and improve your efficiency. You can read more about this in Matt Fitzgerald's book [Run: The Mind-Body Method of Running by Feel](#).

Those are the basics of how to run strides.

About the Author

Coach Jay Johnson works with runners of all ages and abilities. A former collegiate coach at the University of Colorado, he's coached U.S. national champions, adult and high school runners, and is the coach for [Athletics Boulder](#), an adult running club. Sign up for individualized training from Jay at [RunnersConnect.net](#). Check out his [Running DVDs](#), read his blog at [coachjayjohnson.com](#), follow him on Twitter @coachjayjohnson, or message him on [Facebook](#).