

A Runner's Guide to Base Building  
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*For Active.com*

It's funny how training for an event like a half marathon mimics the cycle of life. It ebbs and flows through a variety of training workouts just like the weather through the four seasons. It's no wonder elite athletes succeed in winning races and breaking world records using cyclic training. We live in cycles every day of every year. The cycle of life can be broken into ages (baby, child, teen, young adult, middle aged and senior), by years, and by day. Our genetic makeup demands that we sleep by night and live by day (or vice versa if you work the nightshift, but you get the point). It is just as natural for us to roll through these cycles in life as it is in our training.

Organized training in sport is also known as periodization, or the process of breaking training time into shorter, more specific phases to avoid over training, optimize performance and peak for a target event(s). As tricky as it sounds, it is really just a way to organize your training, just as you would with your lifestyle or work planner.

For an athlete, there are typically three core phases in a training cycle (season); base building, peak and recovery. Base building can easily be compared to building a house. It starts with constructing a solid foundation, which supports the house even through the harshest of weather conditions for years. The integrity of the home is determined by the strength of the foundation. When adequate time is not spent gradually building a solid foundation of training, your body is more likely break down as you transition into the longer, harder training workouts. The key to building a solid base is to start by identifying where you are in your running or walking career.

For the newbie (or those who've fallen off the running wagon), base building means starting from a lower base of infrequent mileage and progressing to more frequent runs including two to three shorter runs and one long run per week. Base building for the newbie is defined by building regularity in training at consistent, easy-to-moderate effort levels, while high intensity, speed work is left to future training cycles when experience and mileage are well established. In one sense, the first training season for a newbie is an extended version of the base building cycle from which they will progress to run another event and try to improve their performance. Mileage should increase by no more than 10 percent each week and intensity should be kept at an easy to moderate level.

It's a little like focusing on building the basic skills to ski down the bunny hill successfully before you attempt the more advanced green, blue and black ski runs (by the way, I wish I had known this a few years ago). The more advanced the ski run, the more specific the skills, stamina and experience are needed.

Another important ingredient for newbie base building is cross-training as it serves as active rest for the running muscles. By alternating running days with cross-training days, the newbie body can train at a higher overall frequency (five to six times per week) without the high risk of injury from running on back-to-back days. Cycling, swimming, and classes at the gym are a few favorite cross-training activities for runners and should be done at an easy effort level if your primary goal is a running event. Total body strength training twice per week can also contribute to the success of your running career by building strong muscles, tendons and joints that withstand the impact forces from running as well as improve your running economy.

As you progress in your running career, the base building phase diversifies to include short and long easy runs, hills runs and short interval speed workouts. The speed workout in the initial stages (three to four weeks) of base building can focus on short, very hard intensity intervals of

30 to 75 seconds with longer active recoveries jogging easy for three to four minutes. From there it flows into longer three to five minute intervals at around 5K pace. As you progress closer to the race, training becomes more specific to the demands and effort levels on race day. By the time you're into the peak phase, the long run mileage continues to progress while the speed effort level more closely simulates that of race pace or slightly faster for longer intervals.

The progression and workouts for each cycle of training will vary from one person to another. That is because everyone adapts to the demands of training at different rates. Fred, who is 22 years old and eats a nutrient rich diet, sleeps eight hours a night and runs with the form of a Cheetah, may recover more efficiently than Joe, who is 42, eats a fast-food diet, sleeps five hours a night and runs like an elephant. This is why it is vital to keep a log and track how your body responds to the various workouts, the cycles of training and your lifestyle. Doing so, will help you create your personal training recipe for success.

Happy Trails...

*Coach Jenny Hadfield is the co-author of the best-selling *Marathoning for Mortals*, and the new *Running for Mortals and Training for Mortals* series. Coach Jenny has trained thousands of runners and walkers with her training plans. Improve your running performance or train for your first race with Coach Jenny's Active Trainer Program.*