

Fully Fit

Improve your form and avoid injury with this elite coach's fast head-to-toe workout.

By Sarah Lorge Butler

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I am a marshmallow. After enduring two grueling days of [dynamic stretching](#), strength training, hurdle and sprint drills—all under the exacting eye of Olympic coach John Cook—muscles I didn't know existed ached and the verdict is in: I am a runner without strength. Soft.

The German-born Cook, 69, uses this full-body exercise regimen to transform his professional runners into complete athletes: fast, strong, balanced running machines capable of withstanding the rigors of training without getting hurt. On top of running 75-plus miles a week, his athletes—who include 1500-meter Olympians Leo Manzano and Shannon Rowbury—do daily dynamic flexibility moves to improve range of motion, strength sequences to enhance fitness and balance, and medicine-ball work to build [core strength](#).

According to Cook, runners can't rely on lungs alone to excel. "If you're just running, you're developing one thing: breathing," he says. Eventually, speed disappears, and you're destined to shuffle, and shuffling is—like being a marshmallow—a mortal sin in Cook's book. Developing whole-body strength gives you "pop," or speed, and the strength to summon it in the final stretch of a race, says Cook. It also helps shore up your form, which can protect you from injury. It's a point of pride for Cook that his runners are rarely hurt.

Of course, tacking on all those extras can be time consuming. But for midpackers, committing just a few minutes a day to some of the following exercises can enhance your speed and shield you from injury. You don't have to do everything. I cobbled together a routine that fits my hectic life and set a PR by 57 seconds in a recent 5-K. I e-mailed Cook to tell him my time. His reply was swift and satisfying: "Big! You got pop!"



Carioka

1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Lift right knee to waist level at a 45-degree angle.
3. Keeping your knee high, rotate your hip so your knee is straight in front of you.
4. Step your right leg in front of your left.
5. Step to the left with your left foot.
6. Step behind your left leg with your right.
7. Step to the left with your left leg. Repeat the sequence for 20 yards, then change directions.

Active Warmup

Full range of motion in the hips is critical for injury prevention—it lessens the force on your feet, lower legs, and knees, says Cook. Do all or part of this flexibility and drill series (plus Carioka, previous pages) before every run.



High Knees

1. As you walk, bring each knee up to waist level, thigh parallel to the ground.
2. Pump arms. Go 20 yards. If doing before speedwork, turn into a skip.



Frontal Leg Swings

1. Stand next to a wall, left hand on wall.
2. Flexing your left foot, swing your left leg forward and back. Do 10 reps per leg.
3. Switch to side leg swings: With both hands on wall and a slight bend in left knee, flex left foot upward. Swing left leg to the left, then

to the right. Do 10 reps per leg.



Donkey Kicks

1. Get on all fours, back flat, and head up.
2. Bring your right knee in toward your torso.
3. Extend right leg upward. Repeat 10 times on each side.

"Doing dynamic stretches after running is almost as important as doing it before. Anything so you're not on your butt after you're done working out. After I play tennis, I do 15 minutes of this stuff.—
JOHN COOK, coach to 1500-meter Olympians Shannon Rowbury and Leo Manzano"



Scissors Side to Side

1. Lie on your back. Supporting your hips with your hands, raise your legs straight above you.
2. Extend legs out to each side.
3. Draw them in, crossing right leg in front of left.
4. Extend outward. Draw them in, this time left leg in front of right. Do 10 times, then

switch to scissors forward and back (see illustration below).



Scissors Forward and Back

1. Same start as above.
2. Move right leg toward head, left leg forward.
3. Move left leg toward head, right leg forward. Repeat 10 times.

Strength & Balance

Using your own body weight to resistance-train builds balance and coordination, says Cook. Do the following series twice a week. Do 10 reps of each with no rest between moves. Work up to 15, then two sets of 10.



Cossack Extension

1. Hold a pole or banister for balance. Lower yourself into the squat position.
2. Extend your right leg and place your heel on the ground at a 45-degree angle to your body (make sure that your left foot remains grounded).
3. Return to squat position.
4. Extend the left leg. As strength improves, try to start from a deeper squat.



V-Sits

1. Lie flat on the floor, legs together, arms stretched above your head.
2. Raise arms and torso (keep them in line) and legs until your body forms a V.
3. Hold for one count and slowly return to start.



Push-Ups

1. Do them on your knees, if necessary. When you've built enough upper-body strength, move on to the classic variety.

"Weight machines don't have the right motion for runners. Using your body requires balance, strength, coordination—that's what athleticism is all about. It's learning how to control your body under stress."—JOHN COOK



Wrestler's Bridge

1. Lie on your back, knees bent with feet flat on the floor. Place your palms on the ground above your shoulders so your elbows are pointed toward the ceiling and fingers point toward your feet.
2. Push up into a bridge position. Hold for 10 seconds.
3. Slowly lower yourself down, landing gently on your upper back. Build up to holding the position for 30 seconds.



Rocket Jumps

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, arms at your sides, knees bent in a shallow squat (your thighs should be at roughly a 45-degree angle to the ground).
2. Jump straight up, extending your hands above your head.
3. Land in shallow squat position.

Core Stability

Most moves with a medicine ball require some degree of rotation, making it an ideal tool for strengthening your core. Start with the lightest ball available and work your way up. Perform these moves three times a week.



Rotating Knee Lift

1. Hold ball at chest height, elbows to the sides. Keep your eyes on the ball and twist to the right.
2. As you rotate back to center, lift your left knee to your waist.
3. As left leg returns to standing, rotate torso to right. Do 10 times.
4. Switch sides. Twist to the left and raise right leg. Over time, increase the thrust of the rotation by concentrating on twisting at the waist.

"We do medicine-ball work with a three-kilogram (6.6 pounds) ball. On any given day, my runners do up to 200 throws or rotations. It makes them explosive, which you need on the track."—JOHN COOK



Wood Choppers

1. With feet 24 inches apart, extend ball over right shoulder.
2. Lower into a squat, and swing ball to outside of left knee.
3. Rise and swing ball up over your right shoulder, pivoting on the left toe and rotating slightly. Do 10 on each side.



Off-the-Wall Toss

1. Get a partner or stand about two feet away from a wall. Hold the ball over your head.
2. Throw it at the wall (or your partner).
3. Catch the return at roughly the same height.
4. Vary the toss and catch: Stand perpendicular to the wall and toss it sideways,

twisting to release and catch; stand in place and have your partner toss to you from various angles or do chest passes. Do 10 reps.



Big Circles

1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, holding ball over your head.
2. Keeping your arms straight and eyes on the ball, gently swing the ball clockwise in a big circle.
3. Squat as ball reaches six o'clock.
4. Rise again as you bring the ball back above your head. Do 10 circles in each

direction.

For these moves and more—including drills to develop proper sprinting form—go to runnersworld.com/fullyfit.

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