

SHAPE



6 Rules For Running Faster

By Elizabeth Waterstraat

Whether you've just signed up for your first 5K or have a few half marathons under your race belt, running faster is sure to be on your list of goals. Here are a few rules for chasing after your next personal best—and achieving it—in running.



1. Start out slowly

Ironically, the first key to running faster is to start slowly. In both training and racing, take your time to build toward your goal. In training, spend time building your aerobic fitness and strength before racing ahead to speedwork. At the races, include a warmup to activate your muscles and gradually build into your race speed. The gains you make from easing into both training and racing will help keep you injury-free, help your performance progress at a rate your body can handle, and allow you to reach a higher fitness peak.

2. Focus on form

The time you invest in focusing on your form will pay off in free speed. Proper running form is both efficient and economical. Watch a video of the best runners and you'll notice very little wasted energy, as every movement serves to push them forward. Aim for relaxed arm carry, strong push off and faster cadence to make the most of your running form. Identify any weaknesses in your form, then address them with drills or strength exercises at least once a week.

3. Follow a plan

Enlist the help of a coach, reputable book or training program. While many athletes are willing to do the work, often the work is inconsistent or improperly timed, which means inconsistent or slow results on race day. Avoid working too hard or too fast too soon. Remember, in training and fitness (and in comedy), timing is everything. A plan will help you reach your goal with the right balance of training so you arrive at your race fit and rested enough to peak.

4. Disconnect to connect

Every once in awhile, disconnect from technology (pace, heart rate, measured courses) to connect with how running feels. Learn to read your body's cues about what running slow, moderate and hard feels like. Focus on your breathing, the sound of your feet and the conversations in your head. Learning to understand and then manage these will improve your ability to pace yourself and race up to your potential.

5. Redefine your comfort zone

Breaking through to a personal best requires discomfort. Once a week, redefine your comfort zone by getting uncomfortable. Hill work, fartlek runs, speedwork, running with a group or taking your run a little farther are all ways to create challenge and change in your running. With proper challenge, you'll find improved fitness and strength that help you achieve your running goal.

6. Be limitless

Rather than asking yourself "why," think in terms of "why not?" Even the best runners had to take a first step toward their dreams. Envision yourself at the end of the year, or even a few years: Where would you like to be with your running? Then, determine how you'll get there. Set smaller goals en route to your bigger goals. Reassess your progress after every race or year, then work at your weaknesses until they become strengths.