

To get the most from your Garmin, you need to understand the different types of running you are doing, what each run is trying to achieve, its intensity and duration. Using your Garmin, you can measure your heart rate, elevation, distance and pace — all of which will have an impact on the intensity of the run.

Athletes generally plateau because their training is not structured, progressive or appropriate for their fitness level, experience or goal event.

Listed below are the different elements of training that we incorporate into our training schedules. Obviously the combination, intensity and duration of these elements will depend on your level of experience, current fitness, time of year and the racing goals you are aiming for.

Perhaps now is a good time to look at your strengths and weaknesses, evaluate your training routine (check out the information on training phases) and see if there are areas where you can make changes to help you improve your racing performance.

Long runs

The long run is an important element of training but we often get obsessed with distance, especially when training for a marathon. At first, simply concentrate on increasing the time you spend on your feet rather than worrying about the pace or distance. The key is working at a conversational pace that has a perceived effort level of 6.5—7.5 out of 10 (65—75% of your maximum heart rate). This may be a brisk walk, a run combined with walk, or a run depending on your current fitness and level of experience. These runs improve your muscular endurance, general body condition, running efficiency and economy.

Threshold runs

Threshold sessions are one of your most valuable workouts but they do require some effort. They are run at a level of controlled discomfort that is a perceived effort level of 8—8.5 out of 10 (80—85% of MHR). At this level you are only capable of uttering 4 or 5 words to your training partners. You will find that these sessions require concentration, but they will greatly improve your speed endurance, running style and economy.

Kenyan hills

Hill running of all types develops the strength in your leg muscles and tendons without putting them under the type of stress they are exposed to during fast interval running. Run up a 7—10% gradient for 30 seconds to two minutes at a solid steady pace. Turn immediately at the top and run down the hill with a long relaxed stride, then turn and repeat without resting. We discovered this type of hill session when we were training in Kenya with some elite Kenyan athletes, so we call them Kenyan hills. They constitute key conditioning sessions. Like a threshold run, during a hill session you should be working at about 8—8.5 out of 10 and be able to utter just 4 or 5 words.

Fartlek

This is a Swedish term that literally means speed play. It involves a number of bursts of effort over a variety of distances and terrains, with variable recovery time. Originally the length of effort was based on the terrain, for example, pushing harder every time you came to a climb, no matter how long it was. But you can adapt it to your own experience. This is a great way of introducing some faster work into your training.

Interval training

Interval training allows you to practise specific race speeds and involves running timed efforts with a controlled recovery period. The perceived effort level is 9—9.5 out of 10 (90—95% of MHR), which means you cannot talk at the same time.

Steady runs

Steady running is carried out at a perceived effort level of 7.5—8 out of 10 (75—80% MHR) and means running at a level of some discomfort. A lot of runners do most of their running at this level because they feel they are working hard, but in reality it's not focused enough to be of real benefit and neither is it easy enough to represent recovery. However, we do recommend steady running at certain points during the training plan.

Marathon pace practice

Understanding the pace at which you can run your marathon is very important. Marathon pace practice is around 7.8—8.2 out of 10 (78—82% of MHR) and enables your body and mind to get used to what will be required on the big day.

Warming-up

When you are doing faster training such as hill runs, threshold runs, intervals or a race, it is important to warm up gradually. A 10—15 minute jog allows your muscles to warm up naturally and improves their range of movement. It also allows your cardiovascular system to prepare for the harder training.

Cooling down

A period of at least 10—15 minutes easy jogging and light stretching enables your body to adjust back to a state of rest. Cooling down stops blood pooling in your legs, and helps remove waste products such as lactic acid from muscle cells, which helps you avoid undue muscle soreness.

Recovery run

Training for endurance running requires your body to work hard, so it's important to plan time for recovery runs. These should be easy and relaxed. You should be breathing easily and be capable of holding a conversation throughout the run. This will mean that your effort level is 6—6.5 out of 10 (60—65% MHR) and it should be no more than 45 minutes in duration. This allows your body to adapt to the training workload. It also helps with the removal of waste products which accumulate in your muscles after hard effort.

Cross-training and body conditioning

It is important that your training is balanced with some non-impact activities such as swimming, cycling, rowing, aerobics, body and core exercises, otherwise you are more likely to pick up an injury that will set back your training. But more experienced runners should add these exercises to their regime too. Endurance running, especially marathons, require whole body conditioning to help you maintain an efficient running style right up to the end of a race. To achieve this you should aim to work a variety of muscle groups and not just your legs. Remember that you are a runner and your cross-training and body conditioning should complement your running and not be so intense that it leaves you too tired to run.

Rest

To help your body cope with the workload, rest is going to be as important a part of your training schedule as running. Listen to your body and take heed of any warning signs. If you feel fatigued even before you've run a step, or make up excuses not to run, or start suffering a series of minor injuries, you probably need more time off. Taking enough rest enables your physical and mental recovery and gives your body time to adapt to your workload. Remember: on rest days, REST!