

Chapter Four

Conditioning Guidelines

By Ed Claassen, a master runner and running team organizer who has learned, through his own and his teammates' experiences over the years, the value of sensible conditioning.

High-level performance, true enjoyment of running, and basic injury prevention all depend

depend on proper conditioning. Your core runners are probably well-conditioned from years of running and understand how to prepare themselves for a major race. But, you will probably also have persons on your team who are new to the track:

- How do you get those new running recruits started on a meaningful conditioning program?
- How do you get the biking, soccer, basketball, etc. enthusiasts onto the track?
- How do you get the ex-high school runners who haven't broken into a sprint in several decades conditioned for corporate competition?

You are facing several obstacles. Good conditioning takes time, a full season or more of focused workouts to achieve. There is also an unavoidable amount of hard work involved. (Notice the careful avoidance of that four-letter P word.) Plus, injuries can easily occur if runners attempt to push themselves too hard, too soon. As chief instigator of this whole conditioning scheme, you will want to be able to offer both encouragement and sound advice to your new runners.

Some of the following chapters provide specific conditioning advice for sprinters, middle-distance runners, and long-distance runners. In this chapter we will focus on some general guidelines and tips for getting started.

Getting Started

Your runners will need at least **three workouts a week** to establish a viable base of conditioning. That level of time commitment can be a substantial imposition on busy schedules and competing priorities. You will need to help overcome the resistance. Enlist the aid of your fitness coordinator or equivalent to help portray all the health-enhancing benefits of a regular run-

ning routine. Use team workouts, or just pair people up to run together. The social support and reinforcement can be important for some people. Once people get several weeks of regular workouts behind them, they will begin to experience some of the physiological benefits that can turn running into a regular habit: increased stamina, weight loss, better sleep, the postworkout “glow,” and a general sense of health and well-being.

Get runners to start with a **moderate regimen**, one that they can handle comfortably in terms of both speed and distance. Suggest that they increase it in **moderate increments**, about 10% more per week. This gives the body an opportunity to adapt. Increasing the training load too quickly invites overtraining injuries, because the body doesn't adequately recover between workouts.

Recommend **alternate hard and easy workouts**. Team workouts naturally promote competition between team members. While this competition is helpful in getting runners to challenge themselves, it can be overdone if runners don't allow themselves to back off and recover. It helps to have some practices designated as light workouts. **Cross-training**—that is, alternating running workouts with other forms of physical exercise such as biking and swimming—is a good way to allow specific muscles to recover while continuing to work on overall conditioning and cardiovascular fitness.

Preparing for a Specific Race Distance

Once a base of running fitness is established, runners need to adopt a workout program that has them running some portion of their workout at their anticipated race pace. For example, your 800-meter runners might do a workout of six to eight 300-meter intervals (with a 2- to 3-minute rest after each interval) at the pace they each hope to achieve in the actual race. A 10K runner might do some 1/2-mile to 1-mile intervals at race pace. See the relevant chapters that follow for more specific suggestions. Also, look over the tables in this chapter that outline the types of workouts appropriate for different race distances.

Some Guiding Principles for Getting in Shape

1. **Conditioning response**—When our bodies are required to handle physical workloads beyond that for which they are conditioned (the *overload* factor), we initially experience a drop-off in capability, but then our bodies adapt by increasing their ability to handle the extra workload.
2. **Overload**—The *conditioning response* works best when the *overload* applied is moderate and progressive. For example, most exercise physiologists recommend that you not increase your total workout load by more than 10% per week.
3. **Recovery**—Recuperation is an essential part of the *conditioning response*. Alternate hard and easy days allow stressed muscles to recover and adapt.
4. **Targeted training**—Our bodies adapt to the specific demands that we place on them. Your workouts need to relate in both speed and distance to your targeted race.
5. **Consistency**—Regular workouts, at least three times a week, are necessary to maintain fitness levels. Conditioning drops off quickly with inactivity.
6. **Improvement plateaus**—Conditioning progresses rapidly at the beginning. Later gains come more slowly and are often achieved after a long plateau at the same level.

Inexperienced runners have little way of knowing what it will be like to run under race conditions. They may significantly overestimate or underestimate their ability to sustain a given pace for the entire race. Or, they may psych themselves out with performance anxiety. The best antidote is to give these runners some race-condition experience in a supportive, encouraging atmosphere. Time trials at a stadium track are one good way to do this. Informal dual meets with another company or participation in local “all-comers” meets are other options. Make sure you help the new runners set a realistic race goal for themselves. Talk them through some basic race strategy, and then spend some time with them afterwards

helping them consolidate what they learned from the experience.

Finally, you will want to be sure your runners **taper back on their workouts** in the week before the big meet. The natural tendency at this point is to get in one more good hard workout. Yet the evidence is that **rest** is much more beneficial to race performance than strenuous exercise at this point. If your runners arrive at the meet fully rested, they will have that added spring and resiliency that could just lead to some new personal records.

At 55, Systems Analyst and mother of three finds new passion in corporate running

Karen Bailey had pulled off one those of challenging dual careers as both working professional and mother of three energetic children. Now with the kids grown and the job at a major think tank well established, she found herself with time to consider what she wanted to do for herself. That included how to keep herself physically fit. She had never been sedentary, what with family ski trips and all, but now in her fifties she knew she needed to find some physical activities that she would enjoy enough to keep her engaged throughout the year. Karen tried aerobics classes and liked the personal challenge they provided. However she wanted something in addition that gave her a chance to be outdoors more, where she could experience some camaraderie, and participate at the level of her ability without feeling she had to match the performances of much younger persons.

Enter corporate running! Karen heard through the corporate fitness center that her company's team desperately needed a fifty plus woman to run a 200 meter leg in the Seniors Relay, one of the events in the regional and national competition in which her company participates. Karen had never run competitively, but felt it was worth a try. She joined the team workouts at a local college track, learned that 200 meters was halfway around the track, and that when you ran hard that far both your muscles and your wind were exhausted. With some encouragement and suggestions she started "getting into shape" for the big meets with a combination of long slow runs and some interval workouts on the track. She ran in the Seniors Relay at the regional meet and won her first medal. By the time the national meet arrived she had run one road race too and felt confident that she could run in the women's 5K road race and the Seniors Relay. Running far back in the crowd in the road race, Karen surprised and delighted herself and her team by winning her age category and contributing to an overall second place finish for her team in that event. But one of her legs was in pain after the race (later diagnosed as a stress fracture) and she had to withdraw from the Seniors Relay. Both pleased and frustrated she began a long recuperating and rebuilding process. By the next summer she was able to run in both events again, and the following summer her team won the Seniors Relay at the national meet. Says Karen about the experience, "This is a unique opportunity to join with others from all over my company in a competition that is both friendly and very challenging. We have fun, it is nice to find that I am able to make a difference for the team, and I have the personal satisfaction of knowing that I am getting a dividend in terms of my long term health! I've learned that for us older adults getting into shape means establishing a regular conditioning routine that starts gently and increases in small increments. I pay close attention to those subtle physical signals that warn me when my body is approaching training overload."

Summary of Training Needs

	Race Distance	Aerobic Needs	Anaerobic Needs	Training Emphasis
SPRINTS	200M	5%	95%	“Short sprint speed” gained through sprint intervals (30 seconds or less, all-out) or high-speed fartlek.
	400M	25%	75%	“Long sprint speed” gained through pace intervals (close to racing pace, but at shorter distances) or fartlek and fast distance runs.
MIDDLE DISTANCE	800M	50%	50%	“Middle distance endurance” gained through pace intervals, fartlek, or fast distance runs (paces related to one's racing ability).
	1 Mile	70%	30%	Same as 800, but with adjustments for racing distance and pace.
	2 Miles	85%	15%	Same as 800, but with adjustments for racing distance and pace.
LONG DISTANCE	5 K	90%	10%	Same as 800, but with adjustments for racing distance and pace.
	10K	95%	5%	Similar to the middle distances, but adding slow distance runs or endurance intervals.

Source: Adapted from *The Complete Runner*. Avon Books, 1974

Planning Interval Workouts

The *Computerized Running Training Program* (Gardner & Pundy, TAF News Press) provides an excellent reference for establishing pacing goals in your interval training. The following example illustrates how to use the program's tables. Determine your point level by locating the time you are currently capable of running at your preferred race distance. (For example, if you are able to run 800 meters in 2:10, your point level is 630.)

POINTS	100M	200M	400M	800M	1500M	3000M	5000M	10000M
700	11.55	23.6	53.4	2:04.6	4:19.6	9:25.3	16:22.1	34:22.5
690	11.60	23.7	53.7	2:05.4	4:21.4	9:29.1	16:28.9	34:37.1
680	11.66	23.8	54.0	2:06.2	4:23.1	9:33.0	16:35.8	34:51.8
670	11.72	23.9	54.3	2:07.0	4:24.9	9:37.0	16:42.8	35:06.8
660	11.78	24.1	54.7	2:07.8	4:26.7	9:41.0	16:49.9	35:22.0
650	11.84	24.2	55.0	2:08.6	4:28.5	9:45.1	16:57.2	35:37.4
640	11.90	24.3	55.3	2:09.5	4:30.3	9:49.3	17:04.5	35:53.0
630	11.96	24.5	55.6	2:10.3	4:32.2	9:53.5	17:11.9	36:08.9
620	12.02	24.6	56.0	2:11.2	4:34.0	9:57.7	17:19.4	36:25.0
610	12.08	24.7	56.3	2:12.0	4:36.0	10:02.1	17:27.1	36:41.4
600	12.15	24.9	56.7	2:12.9	4:37.9	10:06.4	17:34.8	36:57.9
590	12.21	25.0	57.0	2:13.8	4:39.9	10:10.9	17:42.7	37:14.8
580	12.27	25.1	57.4	2:14.7	4:41.9	10:15.4	17:50.7	37:31.9

Select the speed and distance for your interval workout. Refer to the pacing table for your point level to determine the target interval time for your interval workout. (For example, at the 630 point level, a 400M interval workout at 80% speed would call for 8 repetitions at a 68.2 second pace.)

SPEED	REPS	REST	100M	200M	300M	400M	600M
95.0%	0-1	—	11.8	24.5	39.9	57.4	1:36.2
92.5%	1-2	4-5M	12.1	25.2	40.9	59.0	1:38.8
90.0%	2-3	4-5M	12.4	25.9	42.1	1:00.6	1:41.6
87.5%	3-4	3-4M	12.8	26.6	43.3	1:02.4	1:44.5
85.0%	4-5	3-4M	13.1	27.4	44.5	1:04.2	1:47.6
82.5%	6-7	2.3M	13.5	28.2	45.9	1:06.1	1:50.8
80.0%	8-9	2-3M	15.0	29.1	47.3	1:08.2	1:54.3
77.5%	10-12	1-2M	14.4	30.0	48.9	1:10.4	1:58.0
75.0%	13-15	1-2M	14.9	31.0	50.5	1:12.7	2:01.9
72.5%	16-18	60-90S	15.4	32.1	52.2	1:15.3	2:06.1
70.0%	19-21	60-90S	15.9	33.2	54.1	1:17.9	2:10.6
67.5%	22-24	45-75S	16.5	34.5	56.1	1:20.8	2:15.5
65.0%	25-29	45-75S	17.2	35.8	58.3	1:23.9	---

