

THE TWELVE RULES OF TRAINING

There are as many different training plans as there are coaches. Every successful training program has a number of common rules. I have developed these twelve rules using over 20 years of coaching experience and many conversations with fellow coaches. Try to incorporate each of these rules into whatever program you follow and your results will improve.

Begin Slowly

This rule is really like two rules in one. It has two separate, but related meanings. If you are just beginning a training program, start slow and easy. Even if you are in good condition; a new sport or program will stress different muscles and stress joints and connective tissue in different ways. You must let your body strengthen and adapt before you attack it with intense training.

This rule also applies to your daily training runs. If your workout calls for speed work or a moderate intensity run, start out at an easy pace. Your body needs to warm up before you throw any high intensity work at it. If you do not properly warm up, you run the risk of injury. When racing you will usually want to start the race at a pace that is slightly slower than your goal pace. Most athletes perform best when they run "negative splits", which means running the second half of the race faster than the first. If you begin at a pace that is too fast, you may not be able to finish strongly.

Train Your Mind

Your body will attempt to do whatever your mind asks it to do. With any sport or fitness program, there are challenges that you must prepare yourself mentally for. The most strenuous mental and physical difficulties will occur at the beginning of a training program. You should use positive thinking and imagery. Toughen your mind for the challenge that is ahead and your body will follow to the best of its ability. A major difference between those of us that succeed in a program and those that fail is the ability to overcome the mental blocks and negative thoughts that sabotage our success. Before you can overcome the physical challenges, you must overcome any mental challenges that present themselves.

Train Consistently

One of the most important aspects of training is to train often and year round. It is better to exercise a little all of the time than to exercise a lot infrequently. It is especially important for beginners to train consistently so that the exercise becomes a habit and part of their everyday life. All lifelong runners have made running an important part of their daily routine. Each of those runners have had to force themselves to run everyday when they were first starting. Running or any other form of daily exercise, starts to become more of a daily habit after the first couple of months of the program. The hardest part is the first 30 days. Try to force yourself to do some exercise everyday. Even a walk around the block. Usually, once you get out there and get moving, it becomes easier to keep going. The hard part is getting out the door. If you find it tough to motivate yourself, take heart. It will soon become easier and you will even feel as if you are missing something if you don't get your daily run in.

What happens if you do not train consistently? Fitness gains happen slowly. Loss of fitness happens at a faster rate. If you stop training for a couple of weeks, you will lose the fitness gains of a full month. If you stop running for a couple of months, you will lose almost all of your fitness gains. The popular saying "use it or lose it" is very true when applied to fitness. There will be times when you decrease the amount and intensity of your training as a part of a planned rest and recovery period. During your rest periods, you should still run on a consistent basis in order to maintain a base level of fitness.

Don't Have a Strict Schedule

You should follow a formal training program and have a scheduled routine, but it should not be

a strict daily one. A weekly schedule is a better idea. Most training programs will give you a workout for each day. You do not have to follow that schedule day for day. Just try to follow the overall structure of the week. Feel free to move the workouts around to fit your schedule. Try to complete each of the workouts and allow the appropriate rest days, but it is not necessary to strictly follow it each day. With the variables of weather, work and social schedules, health and stress levels, a daily schedule is almost impossible to keep. With a weekly schedule you can fit each work out and rest day in where you can.

There are many times that something unforeseen related to weather, work or social commitments may force you to change or cancel a scheduled workout. If you have a strict daily workout, this may totally disrupt your schedule. With a more informal weekly schedule, you can move workouts around and still meet your training goals for the week.

Set Goals

If you just train aimlessly with no real goal in mind, you will soon lose interest and probably quit exercising. You should set both short and long-term goals. Once you have goals set, your workout will take on new meaning. You will have a reason to go out and exercise.

For beginning runners, possible goals include completing a 5K race, increasing the distance you can run, weight loss, or health and fitness gains. An experienced runner may set goals such as finishing a marathon, improving race performance or using a specific local race as a target.

You can use anything you wish as a goal, but you must set one. You will have a much easier time in following a training program when your workouts have a purpose.

Alternate Hard and Easy Days

You shouldn't run at the same intensity every day. If you have a hard workout on one day, either work out easy on the next day or even take the day off. Your muscles and connective tissue will recover and grow stronger on the easy days. If you stress your muscles intensely every day, they will never have a chance recover and grow stronger. Too much high intensity training will also lead to burnout, injury and illness. You should not, necessarily, work out at a hard pace every other day. Most training program call for high intensity workouts two to three times per week.

Train Specifically

Most of your training should be of the type of sport or activity that you are training for. If your goal is to run a marathon, you should tailor your training specifically for the marathon. Since you are a beginning runner, most of your training should be running and strength training. Crosstraining has become very popular in the past few years. Crosstraining is simply engaging in other types of training, such as bicycling and swimming. Crosstraining does have some benefit because it strengthens some muscles that are not used extensively in running. This will help keep your bodies muscles in balance and help avoid injury. But, as a new runner, you will want to concentrate on running. Running should dominate your training. Your most frequent form of crosstraining should be strength training. When properly done, strength training will take care of any possible muscle imbalances.

When you graduate from the beginning stage and become an intermediate or advanced runner, training specifically become even more important. You will be training for races of various distances from 100 meters to the marathon. The training requirements for each distance are very different. You cannot reach your peak at both the 5K and the marathon at the same time. You must train specifically for each distance.

Use a Periodized Training Schedule

Periodization refers to varying your training during the year. This type of schedule can take on many forms. A high school or cross country athlete has a relatively short racing season. A periodized program for this athlete would be one that concentrates on building a base of easy mileage in its early stages and would gradually increase in speed, strength, specificity and intensity. The athlete in this program would reach a peak or top level of fitness at the beginning

of their race season. The training program would then be designed to maintain the fitness level throughout the race season. After the race season there would be a period of rest before starting the sequence again for the next season.

Recreational runners that run for fitness, along with an occasional race, would follow a very different periodized schedule. The schedule would be less structured, but would still provide for periods of rest, easy runs, strength and speed. The important thing to remember is that you do not want to run at the same intensity all of the time. Too much speed work or high intensity training will lead to burnout or injury. Too many easy runs will result in a lower level of fitness and poor race performance.

Listen To Your Body

Your body will always let you know when it needs rest and when it is ready for a hard work out. Do not let an overly strict training schedule force you to exercise intensely when your body is not prepared for it. Weather, illness, time of day, stress level and time of last meal will all affect your body's ability to perform work. Listen to your body and you will avoid injury and make maximum fitness gains. There will be days when you have a difficult speed workout planned and you just do not feel up to it. You may feel lethargic, tired and sore. This is your body telling you it needs rest. On days like that, just do an easy run or rest completely. You will need to learn your body's signals. As a society, we have made it a habit to ignore what our bodies are telling us. This is a bad habit that running will help you unlearn.

Crosstrain

You should obey the law of specificity of training, which is described above. However, you should always add strength training to your routine. Strong muscles will help support your joints and assist your connective tissue. Almost all running injuries are caused by weak, tight or imbalanced muscles. A properly designed strength training program will strengthen the muscles used in running and improve your overall strength levels. When you start to compete in road races, the strength training will greatly improve your performance.

On your easy or rest days, you can do a different type of exercise such as swimming, biking, walking and skating. This will help develop muscles that are not used in your primary running activity. Be sure that you do not exercise at an intense level on your rest days. The purpose of these rest days are to provide your body with the time it needs to recover and strengthen. If you crosstrain at too hard of a pace, your muscles will not get that opportunity to recover.

Quality Not Quantity

At one time it was believed that more weekly mileage would result in better performance. Many athletes would run well over 100 miles per week to prepare for relatively short races. Today we know that it is the quality of your training that matters, not the quantity. You want to train smartly. Excessive mileage or "junk miles" will only result in overtraining, burnout and injury. The mileage required to maximize performance will vary according to the distance you are training for and your current ability level. As a rule of thumb - any miles that you do not have a reason to run are junk miles.

Educate Yourself

Researchers are making new discoveries in the fields of running and fitness every month. Some of these new findings will make previous training methods obsolete and will uncover new ways of training. You should make it a habit to check running publications and web sites on a regular basis for the results of the latest research. You are responsible for educating yourself on all aspects of your physical and mental health.

