

Busselton Jets Running club



Getting Started

The contents of this document have come from several places on the internet and may be useful as you progress with your running. Please read and use as you see fit but do take the time to do your own research to clarify some of the points.

The perfect running motion

Top 10 tips for a better technique

Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot.... You'd think it would be straightforward enough, this running lark, but take a look at other runners when you are out pounding the pavements or jogging around the track at your local athletics club and you will soon realise that, like dancing, everyone has their own individual style (or lack of, in some cases).

Your running style is called your 'gait' and although there are a number of things you can try to help you move one step closer to 'heaven's gait' (sorry), you shouldn't become too obsessed about trying to alter the way you run, or you may end up creating problems for yourself.

Why? Because the body 'compensates' for its biomechanical imperfections and inadequacies, and your subsequent revised movement patterns may have been your natural way of moving for many years. Besides, many of the top runners in the world are far from textbook versions of perfection, but they still pull off amazing athletic achievements.

Having said that, if you do have obvious gait abnormalities, or recurring injury problems, there is no substitute for a professional 'gait analysis' in which an expert will watch and record you running to analyse your technique and suggest ways of eliminating errors, such as wearing orthotics or strengthening and stretching. Universities that have sport science departments often offer gait analysis, or search for a local podiatrist, biomechanist or physiotherapist who offers the service

Many minor faults are simply bad habits that need to be broken – read the ten tips for better technique, below, and try focusing on one or two at a time to allow the information to become 'hardwired' into your brain and replace old movement patterns.

First though, a word about those oft-banded around words, pronation and supination. People say 'I pronate,' to explain the fact that they wear orthotics, or have a specific pair of shoes on, but the truth is, we all pronate and supinate, it's all

part of the gait cycle, and it's only when the pronation or supination phase is in some way dysfunctional that problems may arise.

Top 10 tips for better technique

Relax – it's impossible to run well if you aren't relaxed. Pay attention to common tension sites, including the hands (unclench those fists), the jaw and forehead, and the shoulders. Research shows that when we clench the jaw, neural signals are sent along the spinal cord, causing us to 'brace' our posture and tense up.

Let the knees, not the feet, lead the legs. Imagine your limbs moving in a circular motion, so that your foot lands under your knee rather than in front of it, where it will act as a 'brake'.

Don't grip with the front of your ankles, particularly on hills. Many of us have a tendency to run with rigid ankles, which doesn't help with shock dissipation or a smooth stride. Consciously think about letting your lower legs 'dangle' when your feet are in the air, as suggested by Danny Dreyer, author of ChiRunning. Swimming, or kicking your legs in water, can also help loosen inflexible ankles.

Visualise growing taller with every step – this should help you avoid slumping on to the pelvis, a position in which your core stability is compromised. Granted, this does require some core stability.

Don't try too hard. Running isn't a battle against the ground or the air. Imagine it as controlled 'topple' forwards – all you need do is put your legs and arms out and you're on your way!

You only need try running with your hands in your pockets to realise how much your arms count in running. **Imagine your arms as pistons, propelling you forward**, with elbows bent to around 90°. Don't allow the arms to swing across the body, and keep the wrists and hands relaxed but not floppy.

Your head weighs approximately 7-10 lbs (depending on how clever you are!), so be smart and **look ahead, not down**, otherwise the weight of it will throw your upper spine forward and make your lower back jut out, putting a lot of stress on the skeleton. Focus on the ground ten to 15 metres ahead. The other thing to be aware of is allowing your head to jut out on your neck, a position many of us adopt sitting in front of a computer or TV, which worsens as we get tired.

Run light – think of running over the ground rather than into it. Don't bounce from foot to foot. Imagine you are trying not to leave footprints.

Don't deliberately 'flick' off the toes as your foot leaves the ground or clench them inside your shoes. Just allow the foot to roll smoothly off the ground.

Monitor yourself as you run. Practice running through a 'body scan' from top to toe. Are you gritting your teeth, or are your arms coming across your body? Take

note of any tension, tightness or pain. A ten-second body scan every ten minutes or so can help you keep tabs on your technique, make you aware of any niggles that, if ignored may eventually become full blown injuries, give you an opportunity to stretch any tight areas and generally help you 'regroup' – time well spent.

Taking to the hills

When running on a nice flat, even terrain it is easier to perfect your running motion – but things get a little trickier when you throw in a few hills.

The most common mistake runners make when climbing hills is to look down, taking the hefty weight of the head forward and throwing the spine out of alignment. Leaning forward also reduces the involvement of the hamstrings, giving you less propulsion.

Instead, look ahead, shorten your stride a little and use your arms to help propel you upwards. Don't try to maintain the same pace you had on flat ground, the golden rule is 'even effort, not even pace'.

Running downhill might sound a lot easier than running uphill, but the knees and quads can take a real pounding, not just because of the increased impact but because the thigh muscles are contracting eccentrically (to decelerate you), which causes more microscopic damage in the muscle.

To descend less painfully, relax, particularly in the thighs and at the front of the ankles, and don't 'brake' or lean backwards. Take your arms wider for balance, but ensure you don't inadvertently take legs wider, too.

Don't look down – it's tempting to do so if you are running on rough trail but try to pick your route a few metres ahead and then keep your eyes focused on the next bit of trail instead of on your feet. If the path is wide enough, try zig-zagging down the slope, rather than running straight down – this enables you to maintain more control.

Breathe easy

There are lots of 'theories' on the best way to breathe during running. I believe the best way to breathe when you're running is the way that comes most naturally. I am not a proponent of all these 'breathe in for two strides, out for two strides' patterns, or of advising runners to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth (although you won't swallow quite so many flies).

In fact, a study from Liverpool John Moores University showed that once exercise is just moderately hard, the most efficient way of breathing in and out is through the mouth, not the nose.

Upping the pace

surprisingly, one of the best ways of improving your running technique is to practice running faster. Just occasionally. when you speed up, your arm and leg movements are bigger, improving your range of motion. But don't try to get faster simply by

taking bigger strides. Research shows that getting a runner to increase or decrease their instinctive stride length forces them to work harder and use more oxygen.

Rather than striving for giant steps, focus on keeping your feet 'fast and light'.

You will find that speeding up your arm movement will help quicken the legs. It's also a great idea to practice some 'strides' or 'pickups'. Strides are a slightly slower version of a sprint, and will help improve your running form. The greater 'drive' required by the supporting leg as it pushes off also puts more emphasis on the hamstrings, while the forefoot landing strengthens the calves eccentrically (while lengthening). From a standing start, start to run and gradually speed up to a pace just below your sprint speed. Go for 5x20 metres.

"Every Breath You Take"

While most runners take notice of their pace and distance, many people do not give any thought to breathing. However, how you breathe during your run can sometimes make the difference between a good and a bad run, and perhaps enable you to run at a faster pace with less effort.

INHALATION/EXHALATION METHOD: IT'S THE MOUTH, NOT THE NOSE

The most effective breathing method for runners is to breathe in and out through the mouth. This is because of two main reasons. One is that you can get more air in and out of your mouth, rather than your nostrils. And secondly, you want to maintain a relaxed composure while running. This is achieved by having relaxed facial muscles. Nose breathing will result in a clenched jaw and tight facial muscles. So forget everything you've heard in yoga class, because "this ain't no yoga class." During your run, the mouth should be held open just slightly, and this position is called the "dead fish" because that is what it looks like. The breaths are short and shallow, but comfortable, not deep and long, and you shouldn't be aware of anything in particular. However, every now and then if you need to take a deep breath to re-group, it's absolutely fine.

BREATH CONTROL METHOD: BELLY BREATHING VS. CHEST BREATHING

Belly breathing, also known as diaphragmatic breathing, is better than chest breathing. This is because you are breathing in more oxygen and expelling more carbon dioxide. You can see if you are belly breathing by lying on your back and placing your hands over your stomach. Your stomach should rise and fall as opposed to your chest rising and falling. In order to practice this, picture your stomach filling up as a balloon would. Every time you breathe in, your stomach fills up the balloon and rises, and every time you breathe out, your stomach flattens. During this time, your chest stays mostly still. And, as an added benefit, while belly breathing, you are performing an isometric contraction of your stomach muscles. This will result in a more muscular and flattened stomach.

BREATHING RHYTHM PATTERNS

You can count your footsteps in time with your breathing. If, for instance, you have a 2-2 breathing pattern, you would breathe in while stepping left foot, right foot, then breathe out while stepping left foot, right foot. Then, the pattern would continue. If you have a 3-3 breathing pattern, you would breathe in while stepping left foot, right foot, left foot, then breathe out while stepping right foot, left foot, right foot. Then, this pattern would continue. If you feel out of control, either because of your breathing or your pace, you can use different breathing patterns to calm yourself down. Practice different patterns such as 2-2, 3-3, 2-3, or 3-4 to see what works best for you, especially during different conditions such as steep hills or racing versus flat, easy running.

IF YOU CAN HEAR IT, YOU WILL FEEL IT

If you hear your breathing while running at what should be a comfortable pace, you are running too fast. This may result in an out-of-control feeling. Slow down until your breath is very quiet

When you run, you get out of breath. This is normal. This is natural. Your body runs on oxygen, just as your automobile runs on gasoline. When you start to exercise--whether running, walking or any other physical activity--your muscles need more oxygen. The body meets this need by supplying oxygen-rich blood to the muscles. The lungs work harder to absorb this oxygen out of the air.

You get out of breath.

Without giving it much conscious thought, most runners breathe in a 2/2 rhythmic ratio. They take two steps as they inhale; they take two more steps as they exhale. While running very slowly, they often breathe in a 3/3 ratio. While running very fast, they might breathe 2/1, or 1/1, but 2/2 is much more common.

If you count breaths in and out and discover you are breathing with a different rhythm, don't worry about it. Adjusting your breathing pattern will not make you a better runner.

The same with whether you breathe through your nose or your mouth. Most runners naturally breathe through both. Famed New Zealand coach Arthur Lydiard, when asked how runners should breathe, once replied: "Breathe through your mouth. Breathe through your nose. Suck the air in through your ears, if you can."

Your jaw should be relaxed, your mouth slightly open. The oxygen will come through your nose and mouth to your lungs, to your blood and to your muscles without you needing to give it a lot of thought. Breathing is a very natural activity--and so is getting out of breath when you run.

Beginners - how to get started

From 0 to 10km

The first step for a beginner runner is to develop the strength and endurance to comfortably be able to jog along. The time it will take to get to this level will depend on your base level of fitness, so it may be a matter of working away patiently. Every runner will be at a different level when beginning, and this is not necessarily a sign of running potential, but more a sign of how much exercise and sport your body has become used to doing.

As everybody is an individual with a different background, some people may be able to jog for 30 minutes immediately while others may need many weeks of consistent run/walk training before they get there. That's OK. All you need is perseverance and patience.

Just like initial fitness levels vary between individuals, so does the rate of adaptation and recovery. So use the weekly schedule below as a guide. If you require a few more weeks than suggested that is fine. There is no need to push things too early.

Introduce 3 runs a week into your schedule. Be sure to have at least one day off (or a day of other activities) between each run. Make each run 20 minutes. Each session should start out with a couple of minutes of walking before moving into a jog. The intensity doesn't have to be high –just jog along easily and comfortably. Once this becomes difficult to maintain, back off to a walk again, but try not to keep your walk breaks to a minute between each period of jogging. How many walks you need is not important at this stage, but just try to keep the walk breaks short.

Once you can comfortably complete 20 minutes of easy jogging without requiring a walk break, then make one of your weekly runs 25 minutes. You can do a little bit of walking in the 25 minutes if required.

Make all your runs longer. When you feel you can easily run the 25 minutes, then make all 3 runs for your week 25 minutes. There is no need to push hard – just cruise along easily.

Now it's time to tackle your first 30-minute run; and just as you did for the 25-minute run, walk a little if required. During the week of your first 30-minute run, keep the other 2 runs at 25 minutes. Keep to this routine the next week: one 30-minute run, two 25-minute runs. This will allow you to consolidate and give your body a break from the constant progression.

Take an easy week back it off to three runs of 20-25 minutes, so you can freshen up and let the training adaptation take effect.

You're almost there You should now be able to comfortably complete 30 minutes, so running three runs a week with 2 to 3 of these runs being 30 minutes will help you progress to the next stage.