

8 Ingredients of a Healthy Training Cycle

If you want to run well and stay injury-free, I would strongly encourage you to follow these eight ingredients to a healthy training cycle.

1. **Periodization** – It's impossible to be in peak shape 12 months of the year. It just is. That's why it's important to spend specific blocks of time in a calendar year focused on different types of training. Broadly, the annual schedule is as follows:
 - Nov-Feb: lengthy rest & aerobic base build
 - Mar-Jun: intensity & competition
 - Jul-Aug: mini rest & mini aerobic build
 - Sept-Oct: intensity & competition
 - Repeat
2. **Slow Down to Build An Efficient Aerobic System** – Aerobic metabolism is responsible for producing 99% of the energy required to run a marathon and 95% of the energy to run a 5k. To that end, spending time patiently developing your aerobic system will give you the greatest return on investment as an endurance athlete, and this involves slowing most of your weekly miles way down to a very comfortable pace. Under these circumstances, your body will become good at delivering oxygen to the working muscles and burning fat more efficiently for fuel.
3. **Value the Non-Running Work as Much as the Running Work** – As a runner, it's tempting to buy into the misunderstanding that running is your most important job. I would argue that becoming an athlete is your most important job...an athlete who runs, that is. To that end, you must learn to move well in all three planes of motion, have a strong core, and good hip strength and mobility. You'll probably get tired of me saying that every run must begin with the lunge matrix and leg swings (LMLS), and end with strength and mobility (SAM). In addition to running, you'll also want to prioritize foam rolling, stretching, increased general everyday movement (being active outside of your daily run!), cross training and PLAY.
4. **Keep Your Easy Days Easy So Your Hard Days Can Be Hard** – Particularly during the intensity/competition phases of the year, it is paramount that you keep your easy days easy enough so that your hard days (Tuesdays and Saturdays) can be hard. If you run your easy mileage too fast, you won't be able to deliver the quality, breakthrough performances on workout days ... making every session somewhat mediocre by definition. In order to run fast and stay injury-free, you'll want to really embrace this

ingredient of healthy training, designed to balance stress and rest.

5. **Learn to Run by Feel** – With all of our modern gadgets, it's easy to become reliant on the external feedback they provide and override the signals from our body. For example, you may become frustrated if you struggle keep up to a pre-determined pace during a tempo run despite the fact that it's hot/humid outside and you had a stressful week. If you left the GPS watch at home and simply ran by feel, you could still be proud of the effort you put forth even if it didn't line up with your desired pace. Learning to run by feel will help you on race day because you'll know how your body should feel for the first third, middle third and final third of the race. Yes, you can check your watch in the beginning miles of the race (mostly to make sure you're not running too fast), but the majority of the race you'll simply fall into the rhythm of your goal pace.
6. **Strides** – Strides are a short bout of running (15-30 seconds) at a given pace, always faster than race pace. For example, someone training for a half marathon might do 4-6 strides at ~5k race pace in the middle of an easy run with ~60-90 seconds of easy running in between. Doing strides during your easy run on Monday, for example, will make your challenging workout on Tuesday feel a little bit easier.
7. **Recovery** – Arguably the most important tool in the athlete's toolkit is sleep. The litmus test I like is: Do you wake up naturally (without an alarm) near sunrise feeling well rested and ready to start your day? If not, there is likely work to be done in the sleep department. Other restorative practices that will help to balance out the stress of training are napping, deep breathing (mindfulness), and massage.
8. **Nutrition** – Do you run in order to eat whatever you want? How about flipping this on its head by eating quality food for your overall health, performance and longevity? The aerobic base building phases are great times of the year to experiment with upping the nutrient density of your food choices (e.g. take two weeks and ditch sugar and processed food in favour of real, whole food and see how you feel).