



Endurance Sports Training

Six Key Running Sessions

By Ben Wisbey

Introduction

If you are trying to fit quality running training around a working week and domestic chores, then why not try these sessions? The six sessions outlined below are designed to fit into a lunch break, in the early morning before work or even after a busy day. None of the sessions take more than 45 minutes, yet all provide a quality work out, giving the most benefit from your training time.

Warm-up

Each session should begin with an easy 10-minute warm-up. This warm-up should consist of 5-6 minutes of easy jogging, followed by some drills such as high knees, butt kicks and strides. This way you will be best prepared for your session. If you want to get the most out of a session, then a warm-up is essential; limited time is no excuse to skip the warm-up.

Just as important as the warm-up is the cooldown. At the end of each session complete a cooldown consisting of at least 10 minute easy jogging, preferably over flat terrain.

Recovery

If you are pushed to get back to work, or rushing to get home and do the daily chores, then simply cut the suggested cooldown period to 5 or 6 minutes and promote your recovery in the shower. How? Simply perform a series of hot/cold recovery periods while showering post training. This is done by showering under hot water for 2-3 minutes and then under cold water (as cold as it will go) for 30 seconds. This should be repeated three times. This recovery technique will aid in the removal of lactic acid and other fatiguing by-products.

1) Hill Repeats

Hill repeats are aimed at developing your strength endurance and running economy. Find a hill of moderate grade (4-5%), which is at least 500m in length. Start off the session with a 10-minute warm-up; then proceed into 5-minutes of running at an intensity that is similar to your 10km race intensity. At the end of this 5-minute period you should be at the bottom of your hill, allowing you to immediately start your first hill repeat.

Each hill repeat should consist of a 2-minute up hill effort; once again at an intensity that is similar to that of your 10km intensity. During each repeat focus on maintaining a powerful forward leg drive and arm action while taking long strides, being sure not to overstride or bound/leap. At the completion of each 2-minute repeat turn around and immediately jog easily back down the hill before starting your next repeat.

Depending on your level of training and your running goals, complete between 2 and 4 repeats. At the completion of your hill efforts, do a 10-minute cooldown involving easy jogging over flat terrain.

Hill repeats will allow for improvements in your strength endurance that will enable improvements in both hilly and longer events (10K to marathon); while the improvements in your running economy will lead to improvements in events of all distance. Hill repeats are also a great way for novice runners to do interval training, as the body experiences less impact forces for each stride whilst running uphill.

2) Tempo Run

Tempo runs are a great method of improving endurance, speed endurance, anaerobic threshold and running economy.

Start the session with a 10-minute warm-up. Then pick up the pace for 15-20 minutes, to a speed that is close to your anaerobic threshold. This speed should equate to an intensity that you could hold for about 15km (i.e. 15km race pace). Do this session over a course that is flat to slightly undulating.

At the end of the tempo period do an easy 15-minute cooldown, which will help you recovery from this hard session.

Tempo sessions lead to improvements in endurance, speed endurance, and running economy, as well as a significant improvement in anaerobic threshold. These factors play a large part in all running events, but this session is focussed primarily on improving your times from 10km right through to the marathon.

3) Fartlek

Fartlek is a Swedish word meaning 'speed play', and that is exactly how you should do this type of session.

After a 10-minute warm-up, pick up the intensity a little so that you settle into a moderate, comfortable speed. Then the rest of the session is in your hands. This is a very unstructured run, allowing you to do an interval when you want, for how long you want and at the intensity you want. It is best to use this type of session to do short, high intensity intervals. For example surge all uphill to 3km race intensity, or simply pick two points and surge between them.

One way of adding a little spice to this session is to do it with a partner and take it in turns of deciding when to surge and for how long. For example, runner 1 decides to surge for 2 minutes at a high pace, and runner 2 has to attempt to keep up. When runner 1 decides it is time to have a recovery, runner 2 is then in control and decides when the next interval should begin, and for how long the interval should last.

A fartlek run is best done over a natural undulating course, such as a golf course, parks, or bushland. This session should be enjoyable, so take control of it and have fun.

Fartlek sessions are able to improve all aspects of your running, depending on the type of intervals you include. This type of running will definitely get you used to varying your speed, which is a major aspect of track events and short road and cross country races. On a whole, this is a session that is interesting, beneficial, and fun.

4) Anaerobic Threshold Intervals

Anaerobic threshold intervals are used as a method of increasing your anaerobic threshold. The anaerobic threshold is the point at which lactic acid accumulation in the muscles is greater than lactic acid removal. This is one of the major factors dictating the speed you are able to maintain over a specified distance. Once you are over this threshold, the accumulation of lactic acid in the muscles will cause you to become fatigued and you must slow down. If you are able to push this threshold to a higher level, then you should be able to runner faster before the fatiguing effect of lactic acid accumulation sets in.

Start this session off by completing an easy 10-minute warm-up as outlined above. Then complete 2-3 repetitions of a five-minute interval at an intensity that is similar to that of a 10k race. This should be a point that is slightly above you anaerobic threshold, thus being ideal for improving your threshold. Between each interval have an easy 3-minute recovery.

This session should be done over a flat course allowing you to maintain a speed similar to 10k race pace during the intervals. Finish the session off by having an easy 10 minute cooldown.

Anaerobic threshold intervals such as this are the ideal way of preparing for 5 and 10k events, both of which require a high anaerobic threshold, as well as the ability to work slightly above this intensity for an extended duration. These intervals can also be done at slightly lower intensities for those runners aiming for a marathon, but still attempt to maintain an intensity that is hard and uncomfortable.

5) VO2 Max. Intervals

These sessions are short high intensity efforts aimed at improving your maximal oxygen uptake. As always, begin with a 10-minute warm-up. Then complete a series of 2-minute near maximal efforts over flat terrain. Really push each interval, so that you are maintaining a pace which is similar to that of your 3km race pace. Separate each interval with an easy 2-minute recovery period allowing you to freshen up a little between efforts.

Depending on your level of running, and how you are feeling, do between 3 and 5 of these intervals. Finish the session off with an easy 10 to 15-minute cooldown.

This session will create improvements in your maximum oxygen uptake; your ability to tolerate high lactate levels; and your speed. These are all important aspects of events up to 10km in length. However, these sessions are very demanding on the body so be sure to do them only when you are fresh with no residual fatigue.

6) Stride-outs

Feeling a bit tired? Want to do a productive session without pushing yourself too hard?

Well how about an easy recovery run with some short stride-outs interspersed? Warm-up for 10-minutes using the standard warm-up. Then maintain an easy/light intensity that is not much more than your warm-up intensity.

The main body of the session is then made up of 5-6 stride-outs, each consisting of a maximal (or near-maximal) sprint over about 100-120m (13-18 seconds). For each sprint attempt to maintain a long strides and high leg frequency. Between each effort have a 3-4 minute recovery consisting of light jogging and even walking if required.

This session should be done on an oval or a grass track that is flat and fast.

This session is ideal for stimulating the neuromuscular system, which can lead to improved technique and efficiency. This is ideal for track runners and 5km road runners, but can also be beneficial to runners of all distances, right up to the marathon.

Conclusion

These are all sessions that you can squeeze into your lunch break or fit at the end of a busy day. All sessions are beneficial to any level of runner who wants to improve their performance over events ranging from a 3k to a marathon. As most of these sessions are quite difficult, never have two high intensity sessions over two consecutive days. To get the best out of these sessions, attempt to be relatively fresh so you are able to work at the higher end of your capabilities.

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