**Run better every day**

There are some runners who run every day, no matter what, and it just comes easily to them – but you may need a plan for today’s workout. Without a plan, it’s just too easy to skip a run. You’ve got pressures in the office, errands to do, classes to take, things to deal with at home. And more. Always more. Which makes it tough to put together a consistent training programme?

Yet consistency is the most essential piece of every training programme. It’s the one thing – perhaps the only one – that every coach, physiologist and medical expert agrees on.

*Without consistency, you aren’t going anywhere. You’re not going to get faster. You’re not going to run further. You’re not going to lose weight, lower your blood pressure, finish that marathon, or achieve your other running goals.*

With a consistent training programme, on the other hand, the sky’s the limit. You’ll feel better and run better every day. So, let’s get with it. Here are 24 ways to add more consistency to your running.

**1. Run with others;** to make sure you do a workout, there’s nothing like the social pressure of knowing someone else (or a group) is waiting for you. Bonus: It’s often more fun than running alone, especially if you’re doing a long run or a speed workout on the track.

**2. Run like a tortoise;** we can’t lie to you. This isn’t a sport of instant success and miracle shortcuts. Patience pays off, often in a very big way. At the beginning of a marathon training programme, many participants can’t imagine themselves running more than 10 kays. Twelve to 16 weeks later, voilà: The cheering crowd and unbelievable exhilaration of reaching a marathon finish line. Stick with the programme. Repeat: Stick with the programme. And prepare to be amazed.

**3. Take a break;** to everything, there is a season. You don’t have to run every day, every week, or even every month. Many top runners visualise their training year as a mountain range. It has peaks and valleys – recovery periods when they let their running taper off, so that they can build all the higher in their next training period. For healthy, consistent training, your body needs regular – that is, weekly, seasonal, and annual – recovery periods.

**4. Eat a healthy breakfast;** we can’t emphasize this one enough. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, because it fuels you for the entire day. To skip breakfast or eat a skimpy one is like failing to rehydrate and refuel after a marathon. You wouldn’t do that, would you? Well, your night’s sleep is like a marathon to your body, because you don’t get any fuel while you’re sleeping. So, carbo-load at breakfast. And add a little protein.

**5. Get cosy with frozen vegetables;** this isn’t a nutrition tip. It’s an injury-prevention tip. If London Marathon winner Paula Radcliffe can take ice baths after a hard race, you can stand a bag of frozen peas against your sore knees for 15 minutes. Nothing reduces inflammation and holds injuries at bay like ice. Result: You stick to your training programme. (Or get yourself one of the commercial ice wraps, often with handy Velcro straps.)

**6. Join the “X” revolution;** despite the many proven benefits of cross-training, we still know too many runners who only run. C’mon, folks, we know all about the “specificity-of-training” rule, but we still skip the occasional running workout to get in some cross-training. Mainly strength training, bicycling, elliptical training, yoga, stair climbing, pool running, rowing and walking. Why? Not because we think these routines will make us faster in our next half marathon, but because they make us fitter and less prone to injury.

**7. Keep a log;** your training log is a great source of the kind of motivation that builds consistency. It beckons to be filled in, reveals the secrets of your training and racing successes, and provides lots of inspirational quotes and useful tips.

**8. Enter races;** you don’t have to race to be a serious runner, but, geez, there are so many good reasons to enter races. RW columnist Jeff Galloway says that entering races, especially marathons, “scares” people into training the way they should. That’s a good one. But we also like the sense of community you get from races. They help you realise that you belong to something big, and that there are more people than you imagined who share your running and fitness goals. Besides, it’s good to go for the burn every now and again.

**9. Pay attention to your shoes;** some things should be obvious, and this is one of them. But it’s worth repeating, if it keeps even one of you from getting injured. Most shoes wear out after 500 to 800 kilometres. You often can’t see the wear, but, your knees, hips, back and Achilles tendons know it. Give your old, worn shoes to a local Salvation Army or similar group, and get yourself to a running-specialty store for a new pair. (While you’re there, buy some reflective gear. The days are getting shorter. Make sure you’re visible on the road this winter.)

**10. Run early;** you want to get something done? Do it early in the day. Everything gets tougher later in the day when various tasks and responsibilities start ganging up on you. In a recent Runner’s World survey, the two most popular workout times were 5am and 6am.

**11. Practice good posture;** not just when you’re running, but all the time. This is especially important if you’ve got an office job and sit at a computer all day (like us). Make sure your keyboard and monitor are properly positioned and sit straight but comfortably in your chair. Some of us sit on those large Swedish exercise balls, which encourage good posture because you have to use your legs and stomach muscles to keep from falling off. Good posture can improve your running efficiency and decrease injury risk. Ergo, better consistency.

**12. Use the fridge;** in two ways. First, be sure it’s always stocked with those key foods you rely on for healthy nutrition and snacking: Sports drinks, low-fat yoghurt, fruit, nuts, carrots, etc. Second, put something inspirational on the outside of the fridge: A picture of you and friends at a race, a training plan, a great quote.

**13. Schedule it;** you’ve got your calendar, your day planner, your napkin with the scrawled list of stuff you absolutely, positively have to get done today. Be sure to write in your workout. Carve out an hour in your day. The experts all agree: Your exercise is one of your most important daily activities. Make it happen. The President of the United States exercises almost every day. You should, too.

**14. Get your clothes ready** and your shoes. Root through your closets and drawers the night before a morning run to select and organise the running gear you need. Another good trick: Have a complete bag of running gear (and a dry shirt and towel) always at the ready in the boot of your car. You never know when you’ll be able to use them.

**15. Run on different surfaces;** see how many different surfaces you can run on in a week: Tar, gravel, trail, grass, track, treadmill, beach. Each stresses your leg muscles in a slightly different way, helping to prevent overuse injuries. (If possible, avoid concrete, the hardest and least accommodating surface for runners.)

**16. Take a trip;** reward your training and racing successes with a special running vacation to take in an exotic international marathon, if you can afford it. There really are some superb races out there to choose from, especially the Big City Marathons in the Europe and the USA.

**17. Stay flexible;** we like that word – it has so many important meanings. Here we’re talking about a regular stretching programme to keep your legs limber and injury-free. Or yoga and Pilates routines, both of which are enjoying a huge surge in popularity. Pick the approach that works best for you. You need to prevent injuries if you want to improve your training consistency.

**18. Run before you get home;** if you can’t run in the morning or at lunch, at least try to run before you get home from work. Stop at a favourite park or trail on your way home from the office and do a workout there. Or arrange to meet some friends for a run at 5:30pm. Once you’re at home, it’s hard to get out the door again for a workout.

**19. Stay hydrated;** eat your fruits and vegetables and get plenty of sleep. We know: You’ve heard all this stuff before. Okay, we’ll stop. But just remember that the simplest, most basic advice often makes the biggest contribution to improved consistency.

**20. Adopt a runner;** sometimes, the most motivating and rewarding thing you can do is to reach out to someone else. It could be someone close, at work or even in your family. Or your club might receive occasional calls from new runners, or those who want to begin. Offer to help. Beginners don’t need a mentor with a Ph.D., they need encouragement, a personal connection, and the kind of basic training, nutrition and injury-prevention experience you already possess.

**21. Start a running streak;** we don’t mean that you should run every day. In fact, we don’t advise that for most runners. But we like the idea of running the same road race every year, or you could run one marathon a year, every year. Or you could “collect” cities and towns by racing in a different one every few months.

**22. Join an online community;** many running websites, including [ours](http://www.myrunnersworld.co.za), have forums or message boards where runners exchange information, opinions and greetings that develop into digital friendships. Often, these blossom into “encounters,” where the online friends agree to meet at a particular race. Along the way, they encourage each other’s training, and lend a sympathetic ear when that’s what you need most.

**23. Establish a pre-run routine;** you warm up at the start of a race and at the beginning of a workout, but it’s also helpful to warm up for your warm-up, so to say. Follow a routine. Sixty minutes before your run, reach for a bottle of sports drink. At run-minus-30, get up and take a three-minute stroll to loosen the legs. At run-minus-10, listen to a favourite psych-up song. Include any other short activities that work for you. Psychologists say these routines help us develop the healthy patterns we want.

**24. Don’t obsess about it;** hey, we wish every day went as planned, and every run fit perfectly into the scheme of things. But stuff happens. Life has a way of playing tricks on all of us, both the unexpectedly happy variety and that other kind. Don’t worry about the runs you miss. Sometimes the best advice is simply to run with a smile on your face, and to enjoy and appreciate every workout. Come to think of it, that’s always the best advice