



THE SWEET SPOT

Are you running too little or too much? Find a balance to achieve your goals and stay healthy.

By Lisa Marshall

YOU'VE HEARD THE WARNINGS:

Run too much and you'll get hurt. But according to a new editorial in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, this dogma may not tell the whole story. The authors looked at injury patterns in several sports and concluded that undertraining puts athletes at just as much risk as overdoing it, while training hard can ultimately serve as a "vaccine" against injury. "Yes, overtraining can cause injuries," says lead author Tim Gabbett, Ph.D., a sport scientist with Australian Catholic University. "But if you

progressively find your way to higher training loads, it can actually protect you."

Boston-based coach and founder/CEO of RunnersConnect Jeff Gaudette says he often sees runners struggling to find the "sweet spot" between undertraining and overtraining: "Beginners ramp up too fast," he says, "whereas experienced runners are so scared of overtraining they often fail to get to a level they can probably handle." Here's how to achieve the perfect balance of workouts, depending on your primary goal.

Learn to maintain a challenging pace by working up to twice-weekly tempo runs.



GOAL: ENDURANCE

Study after study shows that increasing weekly mileage too fast boosts injury rates. Gaudette recommends adding two to five miles per week for three weeks, backing down to your week 1 load on the fourth week to recover, then picking up where you left off in week 3. As you build mileage, watch for signs of over-training like irritability, insomnia, and fatigue.

THE SWEET SPOT First, work up to your ideal weekly volume—the more mileage your schedule allows, the better, but aim for at least 20 miles if you

train primarily for half marathons, and 30 if your focus is full marathons. Each week should include a long, slow run of at least 90 minutes. Once you're comfortable with the volume, change one easy run each week to a tempo run. Maintain for four weeks, then change another. One should be continuous (like a four-miler at half-marathon pace) and the other a "cruise interval" (4 × 1 mile at 10K pace, walking or jogging 60 to 90 seconds in between).

GOAL: SPEED

The heart and lungs adapt faster to training

than muscles and joints, so while you may feel ready to sprint around the track tomorrow, your legs will protest. Start with hillwork, which challenges you without the impact of faster, flatter running: Find a hill with a six- to seven-percent grade. Once a week, run uphill at about 5K effort for 20 seconds, walk down, and repeat six to eight times. On your second week of hill training, throw in some strides on other days: At the end of two short- or medium-length runs, add three or four 20-second pickups with brief rests in between. After three to five weeks, swap your hill workout for a track workout: For example, try 600 meters at goal 5K pace, then 400 meters slightly faster, then 200 meters slightly faster. Jog 90 seconds to two minutes between each. Repeat two or three times, resting three minutes between sets. **THE SWEET SPOT** Build up to two or three days of postrun strides and one hill or track workout weekly. If endurance is also a goal, keep your pace at the track consistent, but add sets and keep

rests in between brief. If speed is your top priority, do the same number of repeats but slightly increase pace as well as length of recovery. Don't push too hard, though, or you could get hurt: Finish every interval session feeling like you could have done one more repeat. Long-term, consistent, moderate speed workouts will trump a few weeks of gut-busters.

GOAL: WEIGHT LOSS

Runners who want to lose body fat are likely eating too much for the amount they're running, says sports nutritionist Kim Mueller, M.S., R.D. However, eating too little can knock metabolism into fat-storing "survival mode." So be realistic: A runner burns about two-thirds of his or her body weight in calories per mile. Often, adding running and keeping calorie intake the same can lead to gradual weight loss, but if you cut calories, don't surpass a 500-calorie deficit daily.

THE SWEET SPOT To break through a weight-loss plateau, mix things up. Once a week, go for a conversational-pace run of less than an hour before breakfast to prompt your carb-starved body to burn fat. Twice a week, do higher-intensity work, which burns more calories and prompts a higher after-burn. Try this: After a 15-minute warmup, run a minute at faster-than-5K-pace, jog a minute, and repeat nine times. **EW**

LESS THAN IDEAL
Overtrain and you may get hurt and burn out. But what happens when you don't do enough?

RACE-DAY INJURIES
You may reach the starting line, but not the finish—Gabbett's research found undertrained athletes were more likely to get hurt during competition.

MIDRUN FIZZLES
If you attempt a faster-than-usual pace, you likely won't have developed the fast-twitch muscles and the anaerobic capacity required to hold it.

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL
Without the fitness and mental toughness that come with a higher training load, your race results may convince you that achievable goals are out of reach.