

The Complete Workout

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Combining training with the rest of your harried life isn't always easy. With a multitude of distractions pulling at you from all sides, your daily workouts often get sandwiched in between other commitments. You know the feeling: You run into the house, throw on your training clothes and hit the roads with barely enough time to tie your shoes. Then after your quick buzz of the neighborhood you shower and change while scarfing down a slice of leftover pizza before stuffing yourself back into the car to head off to your next appointment. Not exactly the life the Runner's World cover models are living, now is it? It may be alright to squeeze in a quick three miles between work and the PTA meeting every once in a while, but doing so on a regular basis can leave you tight, inefficient and injury prone. To maximize your potential and ward off injuries, every workout should be a Complete Workout consisting of a full warm-up, the workout itself, and a cool down.

The Warm-up. It's generally believed that cold, tight muscles are more likely to cramp up or pull than warm ones. You'll also have a more fluid, relaxed stride if your muscles are warmed up. But what goes into a good warm-up? I recommend a three-step procedure. First, you should jog or walk at an easy pace for 10 to 15 minutes to get the blood pumping. If you're planning on a fast-paced workout, you should consider accelerating throughout the warm-up, finishing at close to the pace that you'll be running during the main part of the workout. Then you should use a series of perhaps five minutes of dynamic flexibility drills like legs swings and knee pumps, and maybe some static stretches to work out any tight spots. Finally, three or four acceleration sprints of 40 to 50 meters will prime the muscles for the task ahead. The length and intensity of the workout will determine the length and intensity of the warm-up. Shorter, faster workouts require more vigorous warm-ups; longer, slower workouts don't generally require as much.

The Workout. The workout not only dictates the type of warm-up you'll need, it can be an extension of the warm-up. Whether doing long easy distance or interval repeats, it's not a bad idea to accelerate through the workout. Not only will you be allowing your body to gradually adjust to the increasing intensity, you'll also be teaching yourself to accelerate through or adjust to the increasing fatigue or discomfort you'll experience through the course of your races. Starting your workouts like a bat out of Hell, then "crashing" is the worst thing you can do. Not only will you feel lousy at the end of the workout, you'll wind up teaching yourself to do the same thing in your races.

The Cool-down. Do not pass go and do not collect \$200 until you've cooled down after your workout. Obviously a cool-down won't help you to run faster in your workout or race, but it will allow you to recover from the workout faster. Cooling down is easy. Just jog or walk at about the same pace that you went at the start of your warm-up, but only go for about half the time or distance. Five minutes will do the trick. After cooling down, don't forget to stretch and rehydrate to speed muscle recovery, and drink a carbo-rich sports drink within fifteen minutes of finishing the cool-down to speed glycogen replenishment. Glycogen uptake is further enhanced by eating more carbohydrates and a little protein as soon as your stomach has settled down enough to allow allow it.

Running and Walking are fun activities, and maybe you'd rather spend every minute you can enjoying these pursuits instead of "wasting time" warming up and stretching. But in the long run, cutting corners can lead to injuries that will keep you off the road for a lot longer than that 5 minutes of stretching will. Happy training!

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