

The Right Pace

Running is a simple business. One foot in front of the other and you're off. But there are a few tricks of the trade that can make it more enjoyable. One of them is being aware of the pace you are travelling at and how different paces work in different circumstances.



Beginners and occasionals who run for fitness and to relax, tend to be quite casual in their approach - maybe restricting their sessions to 20-50 minute runs and applying a variation in their pace to reflect their chosen time/distance.

A Must For Your Toolbox

But when you get the bug and are heading out 3 or 4 times a week the urge to run faster and longer is strong. Then there is the challenge and excitement of taking part in races. Once you get involved in the race scene you become part of a wonderful world of medals, comparison with your buddies, PBs and the joy of pushing yourself to the next level.

There is a tremendous sense of satisfaction in working with the body you've got and making it perform better and that's where the motivation to train harder, eat better and push yourself mentally comes from. And for those of us determined to improve, an understanding of pacing becomes a very useful tool.

Honing Your Pacing Ability

Most regular runners use either a GPS system or a smartphone app to calculate time against distance. So it's fairly straightforward to develop an awareness of what running at 10, 9, 8 or 7 minute miles feels like. Over time it's possible to build a really strong sense of the pace at which you're running and your GPS becomes simply a confirmation (or something you start to dispute if your signal is acting up!).

So why go to the trouble to develop pacing awareness, why not just bowl along merrily, after all isn't ignorance bliss? For some that's definitely the case, but not for the performance-focused and PB-hungry. For them, knowledge is power!

Once you are aware of pace you can begin an effective training programme where you mix different paced runs to build the capabilities all good runners need - stamina, endurance, consistent pace and speed. This will develop your running abilities and also prepare you for race day.

Mental Strength

Practising running at different paces will also hone mental toughness. Push yourself in hard interval sessions and you will teach your body to accept the 'pain' of a maximum effort. So when the chips are down on race day, the stress and pressure you feel will at least be familiar. Let your mind decide your limits and when it does you can pull yourself onto a higher level and that is a very rewarding place.

Different Approaches

Being able to relate the numbers - those 10, 9, 8 or 7 minute miles - to effort, will let you get the most from your sessions and ultimately impact positively on your race day performance. Basic race pacing strategies include all-out (maximum effort throughout), positive pacing (a quick start and slower finish), even pacing, negative pacing (starting slowly but building up speed over the race) and variable pacing (changing pace throughout). Different distances (and circumstances) require different approaches.

In simple terms you are probably aiming for a good strong pace throughout a 5k where the first couple of kilometres are comfortable and controlled and the second half of the race is about maintaining pace and form especially when it starts to hurt in the closing stages. For a half marathon or marathon, pacing is more strategic - aiming to conserve resources to ensure you complete the distance in reasonable shape and don't 'crash and burn' before the finish line.

You're In Control

It's here that the importance of the mental side of a race becomes evident. Run your race in a controlled fashion and you're more likely to relax and retain energy for the later miles. Run at a pace you've worked out is comfortable for you, and your breathing is steady and your running form strong. Remember you gain a significant psychological boost too when you go by other runners towards the end of a race.

Of course, you always want to be reliant on your own skills and resources however when a 'race pacing' service is available then it makes sense to take advantage. Don't worry if you have personal peaks and troughs - pacers are a good indicator not a straitjacket. We've all got to run our own race!

More great advice here

