

HOW TO SAFELY INCREASE YOUR MILEAGE

In a related lab report we discussed the physiological benefits of increasing your training mileage. But, can you increase your mileage without breaking down through injury or overtraining? With a little planning, and some common sense, you can certainly swing the odds in your favor. Let's look at how to safely increase your mileage to improve your racing performances.

Although each runner has an individual current mileage limit, this limit changes over time. The mileage that contributed to your shin splints 5 years ago will not necessarily cause problems for you again. You need to be a good detective and figure out the causes of your past injuries. At age 22, my friend Julie had a stress fracture of the 3rd metatarsal while running 40 miles per week. She had only been running for one year, and had increased her mileage more quickly than her body could handle. A few years later, another stress fracture ruined her first (and only) indoor track season when she was training 55 miles per week. Her foot just couldn't take the stress of the tight turns on the indoor track. Today, she is running over 70 miles per week and is injury-free. As her body became stronger and she became more knowledgeable, Julie was able to run more miles without getting injured.

How can you increase your mileage while minimizing the likelihood of injury? As with most aspects of running, there are no guarantees, but the following guidelines will help you develop your plan:

- 1. Bite off small chunks:** Over a few years, you can double or even triple your mileage, but increasing mileage too much at once is almost certain to lead to injury or over-tiredness. Unfortunately, there is no scientific evidence indicating how much is safe to increase at one time. A commonly used, but unvalidated, rule of thumb is to increase mileage by a maximum of 10% in one week. In Daniels' Running Formula, physiologist and coach Jack Daniels recommends increasing your mileage by no more than one mile for each training session you run per week. For example, if you run 6 times per week, you would increase your mileage by up to 6 miles per week.
- 2. Increase in steps:** Don't increase your mileage week after week. That approach is very likely to lead to injury. Instead, increase your mileage one week, then stay at that level for 2 to 3 weeks before increasing again.
- 3. Avoid speedwork while upping your mileage:** Do not increase your mileage during a phase of training that includes hard speedwork. Fast intervals put your body under a great deal of stress. Increasing your mileage adds more stress. Save your mileage increases for base training when you can avoid intervals.
- 4. Reduce your training intensity:** When increasing your mileage it helps to slightly reduce the overall intensity of your training at the same time. By backing off the intensity, you can increase your volume of training without increasing the strain of training. You can then return the intensity to its previous level before upping your mileage again.
- 5. Not all miles are created equal.** When you are building up your mileage, it is particularly important to train on soft surfaces to reduce the accumulated jarring on your body, and to wear running shoes that suit your needs and are in good repair.
- 6. Give yourself a break:** Don't let mileage become a goal in itself. There is no quicker way to burn out and become chronically over-tired than to aimlessly run high mileage. Your training should be focused on a target race such as a marathon. When you have run your target race, give your body a break before building your mileage up for your next goal.

High mileage training isn't for everyone. If you just want to look good in your shorts, low mileage and a bit of cross-training are the way to go. If you want to compete at your best, however, you need a solid base

of mileage. With intelligent planning and by paying attention to your body's responses, you have the best chance of safely increasing your mileage and improving your racing performances.

Sidebar: Do not try this at home

My highest sustained mileage was prior to the 1984 Olympic Trials Marathon. With Alberto Salazar, Greg Meyer, Tony Sandoval, and Bill Rodgers in the race, making the Olympic team necessitated no compromises. For 8 weeks during January and February, I averaged 143 miles per week, with a high week of 152 and a low week of 137 (had diarrhea for a couple of days and had to cut back). Most of this was run at a fairly brisk pace (5:40-6:10 per mile), but I was in base training and did not need to do much speed work.

My previous high mileage training had reached 125 miles per week. At the time, I thought that was all my body could handle. In March 1984, after cutting my mileage down to 100 to 120 miles per week for the last 2 months before the trials, my legs felt fresh and strong. Having adapted to the higher volume, I was able to do high quality intervals and tempo runs while still running well over 100 miles per week. While that mileage looks daunting to me now, there is little question that January and February's high mileage training led to the improvement that allowed me to win the 1984 Olympic trials.

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