



COACHING FOR PERFORMANCE

SHORT OR LONG > TRAINING FOR PERFORMANCE: GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

When it comes to endurance sports, one of the first questions athletes ask is whether they should focus on short, fast sessions or long, steady efforts. The truth is, it depends on your race. Marathon training looks very different from preparing for a 100-metre sprint. However, regardless of your event, every athlete benefits from training all the body's energy systems. That means incorporating fast intervals for speed, tempo sessions for lactate threshold development, and long steady runs or rides for aerobic endurance. Each plays a role in building a complete, well-rounded athlete.

The key is balance. Weekly training should strike the right mix of volume (total mileage or hours), intensity (how hard you train), and specificity (distance and pace relevant to your event). Too much of one element—whether endless long runs or constant high-intensity work—can lead to burnout or injury. This is where periodisation comes in: structuring your training into blocks that build fitness progressively, followed by recovery phases that allow adaptation. Think of it as a cycle of stress and rest, gradually moving toward peak performance for your goal race.

One of the biggest mistakes athletes make is doing the same workout repeatedly. This leads to plateaus where progress stalls. To keep improving, you need variety. Intervals and hill repetitions are excellent tools for breaking through stagnation. They challenge your body in new ways and keep training mentally engaging. For endurance athletes, these sessions also improve running economy and strength.

Strength and conditioning are often overlooked but are essential for performance and injury prevention—especially for older athletes. Building strength in your core, hips, and legs improves stability and power, while flexibility work—such as yoga or targeted stretching—maintains range of motion and reduces strain. Aim for at least two strength sessions per week alongside your endurance training.

For runners, there's an important rule of thumb: your longest run should never exceed 50% of your total weekly mileage. If you're running 40 kilometres a week, your long run should be around 20 kilometres. This helps prevent overuse injuries and ensures your training remains balanced. Similarly, build your weekly mileage gradually—no more than 10% at a time—and schedule recovery weeks every three to four weeks. Recovery isn't optional; it's where the real adaptation happens.

Top Tips for Age Group Athletes

- Train all energy systems—speed, strength, and endurance.
- Prioritise recovery as much as training.
- Mix it up with intervals, hills, and cross-training.
- Strength and flexibility work are non-negotiable.
- Listen to your body and adapt when needed.
- Consistency beats perfection—small, regular efforts compound over time.

FEEDBACK

I'm always learning—from my own experience, from others, and through books, blogs, videos, and more. That means there may be errors or omissions in what I share, or I might have misunderstood something. Science and best practices also evolve over time.

I welcome comments, contributions, corrections, and clarifications—especially those that help me improve as an athlete or provide useful insights for anyone reading. The goal is to keep information accurate and helpful so people can make the best decisions for their training and goals.



If you have suggestions, questions, challenges, or corrections, please feel free to reach out. Your input is always appreciated.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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