

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF RUNNING



There are ten easy guidelines that will help transform your running from struggle to joy. Engrave them in your mind and in your body and use every run from now on to practice and perfect your form in each of these rules. You will be astounded what it will do for the quality of your running experience and your performance, all the while saving you from the running injuries, and the loss of motivation that plague so many runners.

I. **E** Ease off – run at ease

The first commandment is to run gently – to run slowly and with enjoyment, and to do it often enough until speed comes naturally.

For most people running too fast too soon is what puts them off running forever. I give my run tribe the inner permission to run slowly and enjoy! An interesting study of top marathoners' training approaches shows that those who train high mileage at well below the anaerobic threshold do better than runners who train high volumes at high speed. The adage goes, "run often, slowly, and sometimes fast". Speed training is important – but within a framework of mostly slow, easy miles.

The first commandment asks of us to master the Zen practice of letting go: when it gets hard, don't push harder – ease off, slow down, let go – and soon one's energy regenerates and one can speed up again with renewed vigour.

Our approach in every run and every race is to start slow, and to finish strong.

There is nothing more glorious than starting a marathon well within your comfort zone and to feel every 10km split getting faster and faster until one blazes down the home-strait with wind in one's hair and high-octane mojo in one's tank. There is nothing more awful than over-reaching in the beginning half of the race and hitting the wall with a splat, from where the rest of the race is a leaden-legged battle of survival that no amount of slowing down will mend.

Give yourself permission – slow down.

2. P Pat-pat-pat – quicken your cadence

The second commandment is to quicken your cadence.

It is the Excalibur sword of running, hugely boosting speed and helping to shield against persistent injury, because it naturally stops us from over-striding. Our magic number is 180 steps per minute and to reach 188 and higher in races.

To manually measure your cadence, count the number of steps you take with your left foot in one minute. Double that. This gives you your cadence per minute.

Mantra for cadence: Pat-pat-pat-pat - quick, light feet!

3. i perfect your posture

The third commandment is to constantly monitor for good posture which is the essential foundation of a good run. No amount of engine can redeem a crooked chassis.

Think of the letter "i". Become it.

Keep the body billiard-stick straight, with your head right above your shoulders, like the dot on the "i" and with your feet right under your hips. Tilt slightly forward from the toes while keeping the body as straight as the letter "i".

As you fall forward, let your feet meet the ground directly under your hip, and then kick up behind you slightly. By landing with your foot under your hip you prevent the uber-mistake of many runners – the dreaded and costly over-striding.

As your foot meets the ground, strike the ground with your toes/ forefoot first and avoid landing on your heels. Heel striking is like running with the handbrakes on! It is hugely energy inefficient, and it causes injury over time.

Tuck your chin down like a captain saluting. Stick out your chest and draw your shoulder blades back so you can create a broad chest and broad shoulders. In this way every mechanical lever in the body can do its work optimally and oxygen can rush into the wide-open body cavities, allowing for deep, full breaths into one's chest, rib-cavity and belly.

As you run repeat to yourself – straight as an 'i', head exactly on top of my body, shoulders back, chin in, tilt forward, feet below my hips, strike on my tippy toe, kick back. Do you see it clearly? Now do it.

4. **C** **Calm your mind and body – exhale**

“The fourth commandment is to calm our body and calm our mind.”

Monitor your body for tension, for clenched fists, rumped forehead, hunched shoulders - relax these deliberately – because tension and clenching consume precious energy.

Monitor your mind for negative thinking patterns and actively replace them with thoughts that bring joy. Thoughts of gratitude and thoughts of unconditional love are superhighways to a positive mind. When the mind gremlins persist on long runs – eat. It is often a sugar-low gone to one's head.

Beyond managing our posture and our thoughts, perhaps the most direct and profoundly effective way to calm our bodies and our minds is to **extend your exhale**.

To calm down and access a state of serenity and control in your run, make the exhale a longer than the inhale, for example. Inhale for three to four counts, deep into your belly, and feel your side ribs expand, then exhale for five to six counts.

The breath is the combustion room of the body's energy. Many people actively use the breath for performance-enhancing effects, for example, to increase performance – double inhale. Think of the way one automatically double-inhales after a bout of crying. Yes, that's it. The double inhale is said to raise your lung alveoli that tend to lie down when exhaustion kicks in, and so enables greater lung

capacity for greater performance. Combine it with the longer exhale for increased calm at higher levels of performance.

To heat up in the cold, I sometimes use the Wim Hoff rapid in-and-exhale through the nose for 30 breaths, then a long exhale. Repeat. Science suggests that this breathing heats us up because it enables us to access brown adipose fat which is more readily available for energy.

In the end what works best for me is to have regular and calm breathing and sometimes to increase the exhale, especially when I am trying to achieve a new and raised base level of comfort at higher intensity and speed.

And smile – research shows that our body doesn't know the difference between holding a pencil between our lips forcing a fake smile and a real heartfelt one. The same feel-good hormones of serotonin are produced in both cases. I have found that spectators are a hundred times more likely to cheer a smiling runner than one with furrowed brow hauling a thunder cloud – over the long distances of a marathon, the cumulative effect of crowd-sourced benevolence is a huge boost to a runner's heart. Really. Just smile.

5. M say your power Mantra to focus

“The fifth commandment is to prime one's mind for performance using a Mantra.”

We use mantras to remind ourselves of how we want to be at our best. They keep our attention and our awareness on the here and now of the run – moment-to-moment.

Some of our Run Club favourites are 'quick, light, feet', 'tall and strong', 'just breathe', 'relax, you've got this', 'well done for showing up', 'coffee and croissant', whatever works to put your mind in a positive upward spiral of mindfulness.

6. Y Yoga – do it twice a week, and daily

“The sixth commandment is to stretch - often.”

Yoga is to the body what oxygen is to the physical world – life-giving breath. That is certainly what I feel like after a yoga session – like a sea wave that has been aerated – full of life and fizz. When I do yoga regularly (3 x 1-hour sessions a week), my running improves dramatically. I feel younger, more supple, more pliant.

Why? Because when we run often, our muscles shorten and get tight. Our fascia, the connective tissue that surrounds all our muscles, shortens and thickens, reducing our range of motion and our stride. We need to stretch our muscles and fascia daily to run at our best. An hour of yoga two to three times a week does this superbly well, add a daily shorter routine and see your running improve markedly.

It's in the breath My personal experience is that yoga is effective not only because it stretches the body but also because it teaches one to breathe more deeply and more consciously and so programs the body to enter states of calm while active and over time while running.

It's in the mind Yoga doesn't only teach us to breath better, it also increases the grey matter volume of the brain which means better brain functioning, which has great implications for mental wellness, especially into old age. And there is yet another mental health bonus: studies show that yoga helps decrease depression and anxiety.

An example of a good yoga routine is the [5-minute yoga for runners by Jess Skye on YouTube](#).

7. R Roll on your foam roller every day

"The seventh commandment is to roll - daily."

If you can have a daily massage don't read further.

For everyone else, whether you run or not, we all need to roll using a foam roller - daily. Rolling loosens the fascia even more deeply than yoga, it releases knots, and it frees the muscle to be able to lengthen, and without a doubt, it prevents injury. And it makes a huge difference after sitting for hours slumped in front of the computer. Rolling changed my life and my running.

I roll everything – my back, my quads, my glutes, my thighs and calves, my neck, my arms and shoulders and on a good day, even my feet. A good YouTube video for a short rolling routine is [Foam Roller Stretching by Trifecta Pilates](#).

DAILY I do a five-minute yoga and rolling routine in the morning directly after waking, and three minutes in the evening while cooking supper. In my daily routine I roll first and then stretch – first release the knots in the rubber band and then it will stretch more easily.

8. **U** Untap your pain

“The eight commandment is practical magic for managing pain.”

At some point running long distance, and sometimes even on the shortest runs, we get to a point where we experience discomfort or pain. If it is debilitating and bound to cause long-term damage, stop. But if it is just pain, and if running on won't cause injury, then there are ways to help us run through it.

I am about to introduce the Emotional Freedom Technique – a simple routine where one repeats a tapping routine on certain pressure points on the body.

EFT may sound a bit far-fetched, but the scientifically-backed truth is that this miracle routine works to reduce physical and emotional pain, including depression, anxiety, cravings, and PTSD more effectively than most other things people typically use. The simple practice increases happiness, immune function and heart rate variability and coherence, and reduces blood pressure, cortisol and resting heart rate. It is worth reading the peer-reviewed [paper on the effectiveness of EFT](#) – it is quite mind-blowing that this simple technique is not used more widely.

I have tested it over and over again at the edge endurance and have found it my most effective method for dealing with the inevitable pain that creeps in after running for many hours.

You can read it all in more detail on [Gary Craig's official EFT website](#). It includes a helpful diagram of the tapping points and teaches the stages of the tapping in simple and easy-to-understand language. Learn it – and teach it to your kids. The next time you hit a hard spot in your running, try it. You will be amazed.

9. **N** now and again some speed – 800s

“The ninth commandment is speed work – but not too often.”

The old adage goes, “run often, slowly, and sometimes fast.”

Running slowly over time makes you faster. Fact. The mechanism is that one's body gets more effective at fat burning when we run long slow distances in the aerobic threshold and that we build up more mitochondria density for energy production.

The greatest marathoners of our time do 80% of their training in the aerobic threshold, at relatively slow speeds.

¹ Bach, D., Groesbeck, G., Stapleton, P., Sims, R., Blickheuser, K., & Church, D. (2019). Clinical EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques) Improves Multiple Physiological Markers of Health. *Journal of evidence-based integrative medicine*, 24, 2515690X18823691. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515690X18823691>, accessed online October 2021, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6381429/#>

But that said, to increase one's base speed, one MUST do speed training of some sort.

Interval training in a way upgrade one's running engine, meaning that it increases the volume of blood one's heart can pump at maximum exertion and increases one's VO2 max, meaning the amount of oxygen the body can process to run further faster.

There are many interval training techniques, but my favourite is still the classic, taxing and highly rewarding 800's.

800's

1km warm-up easy pace

800m fast

30sec active rest (slow jogging)

>Repeat 5x

1km cool down easy pace

If you have just started running, begin with 400's and then work your way up to 600's and then 800's. The improvement in your base pace will reward your effort greatly.

400's

1k warm-up easy pace

400m fast

30sec active rest

> Repeat 8x

1k cool down easy pace

600's

1k warm-up easy pace

600m fast

30sec active rest

>Repeat 6x

1k cool down easy pace

To work out your ideal 'slow speed' at which you must do most of your slow training, and the quick speeds for your interval speed training you can use the very neat [Hanson's Method Calculator](#) .

10. TOGETHER Find your tribe – train together

"The tenth commandment is find your tribe."

There is no more powerful way to stay committed, consistent and connected than to run together. Our Thrive Run Club in Sea Point runs 10km three times a week. We help each other to show up, come rain or shine. We help encourage each other through the ups and downs of training, motivation and even life. We have the best conversations and every run, we learn from each other as we trot along and chat; and with every kilometre our friendships deepen. There is no greater gift.

Find your tribe. There are run-clubs everywhere who will welcome you with open arms.

If that does not appeal gather for yourself a small group of friends, neighbours, colleagues, moms, dads, or kids – whoever you think could benefit from a regular exercise practice. Set an objective and set a time and stick to it. Just show up and every next step will take care of itself when you go for it together.

Join [Thrive Run Club on Facebook](#) to stay inspired and share your running stories and pictures there. Just do it - not just for yourself but also for others who needs inspiration. We have no idea how much our stories in turn will motivate others to take up the baton. Find your tribe and just begin.

To help you remember I made a little slogan of the Ten Commandments.

Commit it to memory and practice it on every run.

It contains the secrets to your best running ever.

“EPiC MY RUN TOGETHER”

E

Ease off – run at ease

P

Pat pat pat – increase
your cadence to 180

i

perfect posture – be
an “i”

C

calm your mind and
body - exhale

M

Say your power
mantra - for focus

Y

Yoga – do it twice a
week, at least

R

Roll on your foam
roller - every day

U

Untap your pain – EFT
tapping technique

N

Now and again run at
speed – 800s

TOGETHER

Find your tribe – train together