



A heart-rate monitor can help you know if you're overtrained or if you haven't hydrated enough or if you can really push the pace.

[COACH CULPEPPER]

Heart-Rate Training

How to make it work for you
BY ALAN CULPEPPER

HEART-RATE TRAINING developed in the mid-1990s as a more scientific approach to preparing for endurance events. Some important learning came from this new access to tracking heart-rate data, much of which is still implemented in training theory today.

Technology has opened our minds to new ways of training and has allowed for a higher level of individualization—especially as it has become easier to use—but it still has some limitations. Using it as an effective tool requires a delicate balance. Here are few things to consider about heart-rate training.

WE'RE ALL DIFFERENT

The heart is a muscle that performs differently for everyone. While there are generalities related to heart-rate training zones, those zones aren't consistent from person to person, even if their running abilities appear to be similar.

For example, my wife, Shayne, a two-time Olympian, had a very high maximum heart rate of 215 when she was competing at an elite level. For her, following the “normal” zones (easily available online) would have resulted in very ineffective training.

It's also important to realize the heart changes with age and therefore heart-rate zones should be adjusted accordingly. The best way to truly understand your current specific makeup is to get a VO₂ max test, which is offered in exercise science labs at many universities and some public health-care facilities.

BE SPECIFIC

The higher the level of your training, the more specific all the various training elements must become. If you are new to training and



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running three or four times a week, you have a much larger margin of error to work with as it relates to heart rate. As your training progresses, the intensity of your workouts changes and volume increases, the more precise your heart-rate training must be. Some people need a monitor to ensure they're running hard enough, while others need it to keep their aggressiveness in check.

MONITOR FEEDBACK

Changes in heart-rate data can expose such things as illness, overtraining, cumulative fatigue or even pregnancy. You may be feeling OK but get out for a workout and notice your resting heart rate is elevated fairly significantly, only to get sick two days later. Watch for heart-rate trends or days that don't seem to fall in line with what you've been tracking, and be open to adjusting your training to include an additional easy day, taking a day off or getting more sleep.

STAY HYDRATED

I regularly hear from athletes who run early in the morning that their heart rate will be high for the first 20 minutes of their run and then drop down to more traditional levels for the rest of the run. This is all related to hydration and a function of the fluids not being fully absorbed until after the first few miles of the run. It's also largely the reason why heart rate continues to rise throughout the second half of longer events. Many runners notice that even as they slow down their heart rate goes up. This is due to the blood becoming more viscous due to the lack of a proper fluid balance.

DON'T OBSESS

Heart-rate data and feedback can be useful information, but don't let it become a hindrance on race day. The ability to recognize and trust how you feel is essential to performing well. Learning this skill during training can translate to better performances on race day. I believe monitoring heart rate during a race can provide a nice framework and ensure that your early effort is on target. Just don't be a slave to your monitor and let it hold you back either.