



Increasing your weekly mileage will go a long way in advancing your aerobic engine. But you have to do it gradually.

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INCREASING YOUR MILEAGE

How to smartly and safely bump up your weekly training volume

BY ALAN CULPEPPER

— WANT TO IMPROVE as a runner? Smartly increasing your mileage could be a relatively easy step to reaching your goals from the 5K to the marathon. The corresponding increase in aerobic fitness that comes with gradual weekly increases in training volume is almost universally accepted as a means to improvement in distance running.

Although there are plenty of variables to consider on the quantity versus quality spectrum, a targeted individual approach based on your current fitness, running experience and racing goals can help you progress by leaps and bounds. But be careful—increasing too much too soon or without a specific plan can lead to injuries, chronic fatigue and burnout.

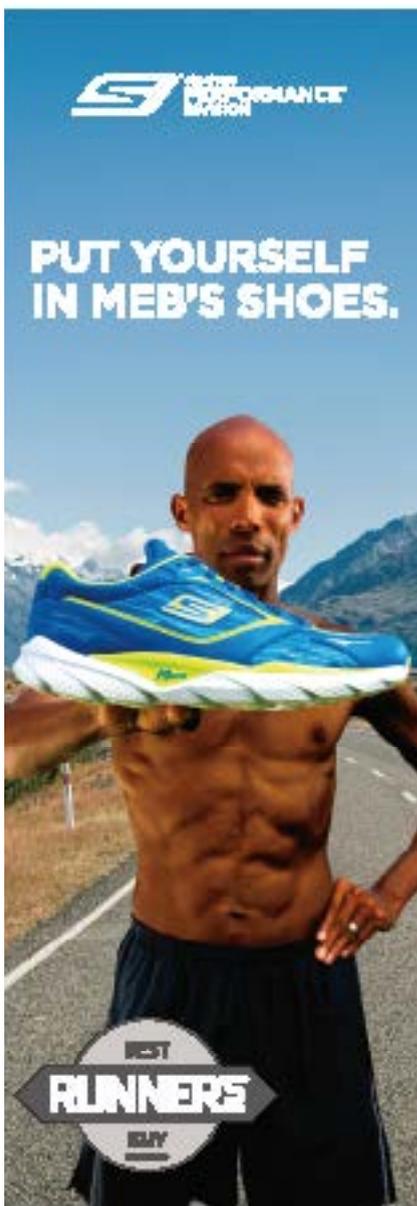
FOLLOW A PLAN

I am a big proponent of having a plan—whether it's a training plan, a race plan or a nutrition plan. Look ahead a few months as it relates to mileage,

plan out your progression on a calendar and see how it falls in line with an event you are training for, travel plans, family obligations, etc. For example, if you're following a 16-week training plan for a fall marathon, you can plan your mileage increase to coincide with that plan or even a longer period. Plan your mileage increase methodically, based on both frequency of your runs and the distance you run each week.

UP THE FREQUENCY

Run more often instead of going longer less frequently. For example, if you've built up to running three or four days a week and 4 to 5 miles at a time, the first step is gradually increasing the number of days per week you run instead of just running more miles three or four days a week. Building up to five to seven days a week will help your body respond faster to training, which will lead to increased aerobic fitness.



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There is an allure to running longer and less often, which tends to lead to slower running and an overemphasis on distance and not pace. Pace and overall mileage are important elements of training, and the best way to adapt in both areas is to start with running more frequently and keep your pace consistent. Once you adapt to running more often, then you can increase the distance. Don't just run more for the sake of running more; if not coupled with some focus on pacing, the benefit of mileage gets minimized.

INCREASE GRADUALLY

There are different opinions about how much to build up each week. The key is to be realistic about your current fitness, your injury history, your age and ultimately your seasonal goal. In my experience, the percentage you should increase each week goes down as your mileage goes up. For example, if you've been running as few as 10 to 15 miles per week, you can safely consider increasing by 30 percent or 3 to 4.5 miles per week by adding just one more run per week. But if you're already running close to 50 miles per week, keep your weekly increase to about 15 percent or 7.5 miles per week. If you are running 80 miles a week, then 10 percent—or 8 miles per week—is just about right. Here are some guidelines:

- ▶ 10–15 MILES PER WEEK
~30 percent weekly increase
- ▶ 16–25 MILES PER WEEK
~25 percent weekly increase
- ▶ 26–35 MILES PER WEEK
~20 percent weekly increase
- ▶ 36–45 MILES PER WEEK
~16 percent weekly increase
- ▶ 46–55 MILES PER WEEK
~15 percent weekly increase
- ▶ >56 MILES PER WEEK
~10 percent weekly increase

MILEAGE TIERS

One of the most effective ways to increase mileage, adapt to the new stimulus and limit injury risk is to tier your volume. A good rule of thumb is to use a four-week cycle: Build your mileage for three weeks, and then drop back down

for a week. I used this method throughout my 12-year professional career and have seen it translate very well to runners of all abilities.

By building for three weeks, your body is under more stress to adapt week over week. The “down” week allows your body to recover slightly and absorb the training you've been doing and not just endure it. Your mileage for the down week should match the volume of week 2 of the cycle. The first week of the second four-week cycle should match week 3 of the first cycle. Reference the chart below for a runner who begins with weekly mileage of about 18 to 20 miles as an example.

CONCLUSION

Distance running is primarily an aerobic activity and the best way to increase your aerobic fitness is by increasing your running mileage. Your ultimate elevated weekly mileage total will depend on your fitness, the time you have to train and the length of your training program. Your faster-paced workouts once or twice a week will count toward your mileage total, but ultimately most of your mileage will probably be slow to moderately paced. In short, mileage matters.

FOR A RUNNER LOGGING 18 TO 20 MILES PER WEEK OVER AN EIGHT-WEEK PERIOD, HERE IS A SAMPLE PROGRESSION:

- WEEK 1—20 MILES
- WEEK 2—25 MILES
- WEEK 3—31 MILES
- WEEK 4—25 MILES
- WEEK 5—31 MILES
- WEEK 6—37 MILES
- WEEK 7—43 MILES
- WEEK 8—37 MILES



▶ Running coach and two-time U.S. Olympian **ALAN CULPEPPER** is a vice president with Competitor Group Inc. and a race director for the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon Series.