



[ COACH CULPEPPER ]

## Correcting Common Mistakes

Don't fall victim to these common training foibles.

BY ALAN CULPEPPER

AS AN ATHLETE, and now a coach, I've noticed that many runners make similar mistakes in their training—common errors that can lead to underperformance, staleness or lack of progression in training and racing. Some of these are not due to a lack of motivation or willingness to put in the work but rather not having a comprehensive view of training; many runners unknowingly slip into some bad habits. Training is one part science and one part art in finding the right balance of elements. Often athletes think two or three weeks in advance and fail to look at the larger picture. Or they think that training is rather generic and just about pushing themselves. It's important to

recognize that it is more than just getting out the door three or four days a week and jumping in with anyone willing to do a harder workout. It is imperative to think critically and comprehensively and beware of some of these common shortcomings:

### LACK OF PERIODIZATION

➔ Periodization is a function of breaking up your training into smaller periods during the course of the year. It has become very common for athletes to follow one training program and then another leading up to different events. This is certainly better than not following a training plan altogether, but in order to see significant gains, consideration must be given to what you do prior to starting an eight- to 16-week plan.

The base phase is often the most neglected period of training. Many athletes

tend to prepare for one race, take a break from running altogether after crossing the finish line, then begin preparing for another. Each period of training should have overlapping elements, such as speed work, threshold work and longer tempo efforts, but it's important that the focus on mileage, strength, pace and the long run varies. Physical and emotional rest after a marathon or hard half marathon is vitally important but equally important is having a period of higher volume with a focus on cumulative strength before starting the specific training plan. Don't be afraid to have a two- or three-month period of just running. It is amazing how much benefit you can get from mileage, a good long run and just one faster workout a week. Don't fall into the trend of taking several months off and then jumping back into your standard buildup for a race.

### [ QUICK TIP ]



### SHORT SPEED DRILLS

Perform these short supplementary speed sessions to help improve power and speed.

TWICE a week, after an easy run:

#### 100-Meter Strides

➔ Accelerate for 20 meters on flat terrain, hold close to your top speed for the next 60 meters and decelerate over the final 20 meters. Perform 6 to 10 repetitions with about 60 seconds rest in between.

ONCE a week, after an easy run:

#### Hill Repeats

➔ Run 20-second repetitions uphill at a hard effort on a moderately steep grade. Start with 2 repetitions the first time out and add one rep a week over the course of 10 weeks.



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**[ COACH CULPEPPER ]****THE GENERALIST APPROACH**

➔ In the generalist approach, many of your workouts fall into the same effort level—there is a lack of true, targeted training designed for a specific event. If you are training for a 5K, the training should look quite different than marathon preparation. Many runners, understandably, meet a group and then inevitably do the group workout that is not necessarily intended for a large variety of athletes, ability levels and events. Unknowingly, many runners limit themselves by doing generic group training. Don't get me wrong—meeting up with a group can be very beneficial, especially when getting out the door is less than inspiring. However, you still need to look at the elements of your training that you really need to improve upon. If you've hit a plateau, step away from the generalist approach and rethink the detailing of your specific workouts.

**LOSING FOCUS ON SPEED**

➔ It is inevitable that as we age we lose some of the pop in our legs. Or, we move up in distance and focus on speed less and less. It is very common to work on our strengths, which is not all that bad when we are younger, but as we age it is extremely important to schedule training sessions faster than goal race pace. Resistance to speed work is often due to the fear of getting injured, and this is important to keep in mind. To be clear, I am not advocating all-out sprinting, but even if you are training for longer events, speed work in the 5K-pace range is very valuable for developing a full complement of muscle fibers. Likewise, efficiency at a slower pace is maximized, as is the firing of the nervous system. A little bit of speed goes a long way. One faster workout every two weeks, such as 100-meter strides or short hill repeats, can be just what you need. Be smart, be prudent, but also be intentional about including speed work in your training plan.