

## THE REAL BENEFIT OF EASY DAYS

With all the discussion and focus surrounding speed workouts, long runs and mileage, we often lose sight of the most dominant aspect of any training program: easy days. While they don't have the cachet of mile repeats or a 20-mile long run, they're critical to your training.



### ARE YOU RECOVERING ON EASY DAYS?

“Recovery” is a very loose term. You are not actually recovering by running easy—you are giving your system a break from intense training. “Easy day,” then, is more accurate than “recovery day.” Easy days simply keep you from becoming more physically and muscularly fatigued to ensure the body’s physiological systems do not get overloaded. Without factoring in easy days, something will inevitably break down.

### WHY SHOULD THEY BE INCLUDED?

So why include easy days? If the goal is to recover, why not just take a day off? A day off would be considered a true recovery day, and if you are new to targeted training then days off should be a part of your program. There is a misconception that only speed workouts and long runs stress the various systems enough to make significant physical improvements. This is not the case. Easy runs improve overall aerobic and muscular fitness—and provide a slight amount of physical stress, which forces the body to adapt.

### HOW EASILY SHOULD YOU RUN?

This is difficult to answer, since every athlete responds differently to training. There is no magic formula that says your easy days should be ‘x’ pace per mile. Pacing and heart rate guidelines certainly exist (and are worth experimenting with) but they don’t hold true across the board. Some athletes can handle a quicker pace on easy runs while others need to run much slower. I’ve found that many athletes run far too slow on their easy days because they are thinking of them only as “recovery” and not a means to getting fitter, while others run them too fast and those efforts become a slightly slower version of their hard workouts. When all workout paces start to blend together, everything becomes a moderate-intensity effort. It’s critical to vary your intensity to ensure that all your physiological systems are properly stressed.



Two-time U.S. Olympian Alan Culpepper won national titles from the 5K to the marathon. His first book, “Run Like a Champion,” is available at [VeloPress.com](http://VeloPress.com).