

# Something for the Trail Running Rookie

So you've decided to tackle the trails! Chances are you've done a bit of general running already, and that's great. But here's a few tips to make sure the trails don't turn into a trial.

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Most people come to trail running after a bit of normal running. If this is you, then the first thing to note is that the amount of running doesn't change much. But the type of running, the gear you run in and your own personal safety all go to new levels of consideration.

## Endurance

Whether you're running on the road or along mountain trails, endurance is still everything. The benchmark for developing endurance is being able to run 60min three times per week. If you can do that, you'll continue to improve and also be able to handle longer runs necessary for longer races.

Pace judgment is everything for trail running. You need to run at efforts that you can continue a conversation. Much faster/harder and you won't be able to last that 60min that builds endurance. As you get fitter and set bigger goals, pacing becomes even more crucial because for any events longer than two hours you need to build up to a weekly run at least that long.

## Strength

Strength is crucial for trail running. The changes in terrain tax your leg muscles more, which can lead to exhaustion and injuries such as ankle sprains. Obviously, training on the trails you'll make you stronger because of the changes in terrain. But you can fast-track strength with a weekly run on extremely hilly terrain where in one hour you might cover half a dozen hills of five to 10min long. It's important to note that the downhills are as much a part of your training as the uphill. Uphills condition your muscles to drive forward. Downhills conditions your muscles to hold you and absorb impact.

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## Recovery

As much as we talk about endurance and strength, the most important aspect of training is well-planned rest. From a scientific point of view, all training actually does is show your body the stresses of the goal, and over time it adapts to those stresses by becoming stronger and more efficient. But the body actually only adapts to the training if you give it some rest. If you don't rest, it eventually gets tired and often injured.

The general rule is follow harder training days with at least one easy day, or even a day off. The harder days are hilly runs or long runs and any runs of race-type intensities, including race themselves. Longer races, especially, need planned recovery, with the accepted norm being an easy day for every 3k you have raced. Every two or three weeks you should have an easier week where you reduce the length of your runs by about 50 percent.

## Eat, Drink & Stay Happy

Nutrition plays a big role in trail running. The increased muscular demands and weather variations burns more energy. So if you're heading out for more than an hour, you need to think about topping up as you go. The general rule is a food item every 45-60min (banana, muesli bar, energy bar, energy gel etc) and 500 to 700ml of fluid per hour. Good running backpacks have fluid bladders with mouth pieces that allow you to take two to three litres of fluid, which would last you four to six hours. If you use energy drink it will help keep carbohydrate intake up between proper food items, but just as importantly is that proper energy drinks also replace electrolytes lost to sweat.

### Kit Yourself Out

A good running backpack brings us nicely to kitting yourself out adequately for specialist trail running. If you progress beyond low-key 5-15k trail runs, a backpack becomes important for carrying the essentials that every trail runner should take.

Specialist running packs are best because as well as having the same technical materials as normal day-packs, they are usually a bit lighter, have features for faster access, drink bladders and water bottles, and a snugger fit so they don't bob around when running.

If you take to the trails only occasionally and close to home, normal running shoes and clothing is fine. But if trail running becomes your thing, then specialist gear will make it more enjoyable and safer.

Trail shoes are designed to take more punishment while providing more stability and grip. Trail shoes typically have multidirectional rubber studs to provide traction on rough and wet terrain. Look for softer rubber on the soles because hard rubbers tend to slip more on wet rocks and slick surfaces. Trail shoes also have well-placed protective features on the side of the shoe to stop it being torn and your foot getting blistered from rubbing on the sides of tree roots and rocks. The shoe cushioning isn't as important as for a road running shoe, but you still need protection from standing on stones. But avoid cushioning that is too high because it can make the shoe unstable on rough ground and more likely to lead to sprained ankles.

Clothing is important when you head for the trails. In one run you can experience very real changes in temperature and conditions. So you need clothing options that can keep you cool or warm. The secret to the clothing conundrum is layering. Two or three thin layers are better than one heavier layer because you can put them on and take them off as needed. Often that means a backpack or bum bag with a spare top and jacket and sometimes even hat and gloves and tights.



Socks are another factor that become more important off-road than on-road. They need to provide comfort and protection when wet and muddy. A lot of people go for the thickest running sock they can find, but sometimes wearing two thin pairs can be better because one layer takes the skin friction and the other layer keeps the mud and water away from the skin. For long runs/races with extreme mud and river crossing a pair of lightweight tramping boot covers (putties) help keep grit out.

If you are prone to blistering and chafing, use Vaseline on and even place sticking plasters over nipples. Cycle shorts without padding are a solution for thigh chafing.

### Be Safe & Seen

Even the most residential trail has an element of remoteness and terrain that can send you tumbling. So being prepared for issues is important. Number one is to tell others where you're going and what time you will be back. Number two is to run in bright clothing so you can be seen and/or found. Number three is a mobile phone, because reception is much more widespread than you might think and having that communication can get you unlost or at least how long it might be until you're found.

If you're venturing further afield always fill out trail-head and hut visitor logs and always take food, drink and spare clothing. If you're lost or late or worse, the visitor logs help others work out where you have and haven't been. If you have some gear (thermal top, jacket, hat & gloves, first aid kit, foil blanket, food & drink) then you can wait out most situations. And if you are lost or injured, stay where you are and wait for help because it is almost impossible to find a needle that keeps moving in a haystack.

The best safety tip you'll ever hear, however, is to run with others. Closer to home, a running partner can help you home or go for help. When further afield, four is the best number so that one person can stay with the injured runner while two others can safely go for help. And trail running with others is always more fun!

## EXAMPLE SCHEDULE - TRAIL RACE OF 10K TO 25k

Check out this guide for trail running rookies building up for their first event. It assumes you have some running experience whereby you can handle 30min, three times per week.

Just slip into the schedule at whatever level suits your current fitness and goals, and add 5min to each run every week over an eight to 12-week period.

If you're struggling every now and then, especially on the longer runs, taking a 1min walk break every 15 to 30min will make all the difference without affecting your fitness gains.

DAY	TRAINING	NOTES
Mon	Day Off	Some prefer cross-training (e.g: gym session, swim, cycle).
Tues	Easy Run: 30-90min	Comfortable effort on undulating terrain. But not too hilly.
Wed	Day Off	More advanced runners might try an easy 30-60min run on flat terrain. Some prefer cross-training (e.g: gym session, swim, cycle).
Thur	Hilly Run: 30-90min	Comfortable effort on hilly terrain. Advanced might try working the uphill harder than steady.
Fri	Day Off	Some prefer cross-training (e.g: gym session, swim, cycle).
Sat	Steady Run: 30-60min	A firm effort on undulating terrain & rough terrain. But not too hilly.
Sun	Long Run: 1hr-3hrs	Easy effort over terrain similar to the goal race. Gradually build up to however long you think the race will take. Newer runners can include walk breaks & gradually phase them out.