



CRUSH IT. THEN COOL IT

New research suggests you may enjoy runs more if you get the tough parts out of the way early.

By Cindy Kuzma

PROGRESSION RUNS that end fast. Races where you cross the line with a kick. Long miles that toughen as they pile on. Many running experiences involve easing in—and finishing hard.

But a new study in the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* supports flipping that format. Participants who ramped down as a workout progressed instead of building up

rated the experience more pleasant, says study author **Pantelimon Ekkekakis, Ph.D., of Iowa State University.** Those good vibes probably increase the odds they'll exercise again, he says.

Still, many runners enjoy difficult efforts, but even they can benefit from an occasional easy-finish run. Here's how to put ramping down into practice.

Finishing a hard or long run with a walking cooldown can help new and returning runners stay motivated.



EVERYDAY RUNS

A new or recently re-booted running routine nearly always feels tough. Muscles and joints ache until your body adapts to the regular pounding of feet against ground. And your heart struggles to shuttle oxygen-rich blood to your muscles, leaving you huffing and puffing, says Greg McMillan, M.S., coach and exercise physiologist.

Starting with run-walk intervals decreases physical and mental strain, says Mary Jung, Ph.D., an exercise psychology researcher at the University of British Columbia. A ramp-down plan may trigger a surge of feel-good hormones earlier so you feel better during and after your workout, **Ekkekakis** says.

TRY IT Walk for 10 minutes to warm up. Then, run for five minutes (or as long as you can without stopping) and walk for one minute. Decrease the running interval by one minute each time—so if you start at five minutes, you're running for four, three, two, and then one minute, with one-minute walk breaks in between. End with a five- to 10-minute walk to cool down.

INTERVAL WORKOUTS

What once felt like a lung-searing struggle gradually transforms into an easy jog as you run consistently. That's why experienced runners use interval workouts—periods of harder, faster running

interspersed with jogging or walking breaks—to continue improving their speed and stamina.

Many interval sessions involve repetitions of equal length. But "pyramid" workouts, which shift from short to long reps and then back down, add benefits by posing varied challenges to your body and mind, says Nikki Reiter, a British Columbia-based biomechanist and coach for The Run S.M.A.R.T. Project. For instance, you may train your fast-twitch muscle fibers, hone your ability to focus at race pace, and work on your finishing kick, all in one session.

If you're new to speedwork or coming back to it after a break, try a "one-sided pyramid," in which you decrease the distance while maintaining the same intensity, Reiter says: You can fit in a hard workout without feeling as beat up. Over time, advanced runners can speed up as they decrease the length of their reps to reap more benefits.

TRY IT Warm up with 10 minutes of jogging, then run the following repeats with one-minute jogging recoveries: one mile, 1200 meters, 1,000 meters, 800 meters, 400 meters. Cool down for five to 10 minutes. If you haven't done speedwork lately, keep all reps at about 10K pace (where you could speak a few words, but not full sentences); if you're more advanced, start there and gradually speed up, ending closer to your mile race pace.