

Form Tips

1. Stay Upright

Good running posture is simply good body posture. When the head, shoulders and hips are all lined up over the feet, you can move forward as a unit, with a minimum amount of effort.

2. Chest Forward

Many runners let their chest sag into a slouch. In such a position, the lungs won't maximize their efficiency. Before starting your run, relax and take a deep breath, which moves the lungs into an efficient position. After you exhale, maintain the chest in this beneficial alignment. The most efficient way to run is to have your head, neck and shoulders erect. When you run leaning forward, you're always fighting gravity.

3. Hips Forward

One of the most common form of errors is letting the hips shift back and the butt stick out behind you. Taking a deep breath often pulls the hips forward also, into an alignment which allows easier running.

4. The Foot Plant

There is a difference between what should happen and what you may be able to control. First, let your shoe professional fit you with a couple of pairs of shoes that are right for you. Then just start running! Your personal stride is the result of your shape, your physique and the strength and balance of your muscles at least all the way up to your waist! Please don't try to change your foot plant as you train: you will not be running naturally and you are very likely to cause more problems than you solve. Changes to your gait only happen as a result of longer-term changes elsewhere. As you gain fitness and strength, you may well notice that many irregularities resolve themselves. Modern training shoes are designed to accommodate biomechanically different feet. Maybe the problem you thought you had will turn out to be not so much of a problem after all. But if you really do have a problem that continues to affect your activity, you may have to seek the advice of a therapist or coach to assess and deal with your particular situation.

5. Arms

Arm position can vary widely from one runner to the next. In general, the arms should swing naturally and loosely from the shoulders. Not too high and not too low. This usually means staying relaxed. Staying relaxed will prevent the arms from being carried too high and too rigid, which will expend more energy than needed. Your hands should never cross the center

of your chest. Remember you want your body to go forward and not side-to-side, so your arms should, too. Keep your hands in a relaxed position and try not to clench or make fists.

6. Stride Length

As a coach, my experience has shown that as runners get faster, their stride length shortens. Leg turnover rate, the cadence of the runner's legs, is the key to faster and more efficient running. Staying light on your feet with a more rapid leg turnover rate will keep many of the aches, pains and injuries away, providing injury-free training.

Sprinters have a high knee lift. The long-distance runner, anyone running more than mile, needs to minimize knee lift. If your knees go too high, you are overusing the quadriceps muscles on the front of the thigh. This overstriding leaves the runner with sore quadriceps at the end of their run. Keep your leg turnover light and rapid—more of a shuffle than the sprinter's stride.

Stay relaxed with a low, short stride while lightly touching the ground. This will prevent tightness in the shin, behind the knee or in the back of the thigh in the hamstring. Kicking too far forward tightens up the lower leg and hamstrings.

Do short accelerations while staying light on your feet. Keep your foot strike quieter with each stride, keeping your foot close to the ground to prevent any negative forces of gravity from excessive bounce.

7. Head and Neck

Your torso will normally do what your head is doing. So if you are dropping your head right down, your torso will probably follow and lean too far forward. Keep the neck and shoulders relaxed. Try not to hunch your shoulders, which will cause undue fatigue to that area. Your eyes should be looking somewhere about 20 to 30 m ahead of you.

8. Practice Your Technique

Once or twice a week, a little technique work is really helpful. After your warm-up, run some accelerations of 50 to 150 m. Pick one of the elements of good form and feel yourself executing it well during the acceleration. Rehearse each element at least four times, and keep to one or two elements at most in each session. A change in technique may feel a little awkward at first, but you'll know when you've got it right it feels so good! You can follow the lead of athletes in events like sprinting and hurdling, where effective technique is a vitally important ingredient of success. Their warm-up is actually designed so that their technique (they often call it "skill") is rehearsed every time they prepare for training or competition. Your warm-up consists of a period of jogging and stretching. Build in some technique accelerations, too. They take very little extra time.

You'll get the most effective "motor learning" by focusing on one point of technique for a short period of time and repeating it several times. When you're moving your body in a new way, your body gets tired, and quickly! You'll feel it and there will be a noticeable loss in your coordination and motor skill. It's temporary; the short break between accelerations will give you the recovery you need.
