

Walk Breaks

If I can now run continuously for 20 minutes without walking breaks do I need to take them during my long runs? Walking breaks are always optional. They should be incorporated in all long runs. The walk break provides a great platform for the runner to expand the distance of the long run. The key to the running programs developed in this book and in our Running Room clinics is to keep the program gentle and progressive. First, the word gentle. The program is gentle enough to provide the runner with a comfortable, safe system, a program designed to prevent injury and show improvement while keeping runners highly motivated. Second, the word progressive. The program is progressive because it continues to challenge the runner to improve their individual level of wellness and fitness.

The whole purpose of the long run is to build up your endurance training. Endurance training is "Long Slow Distance." This endurance training adapts the runner's fitness to exercising for an extended period of time. The endurance or long run portion of your training is also the fat-burning session. By inserting walk-run combinations we are able to greatly extend the distance we are able to cover on our long run. The added distance has the runner in a fat burning mode for a longer time and challenges the runner to adapt to the rigors of training for a longer period of time. The rest breaks every 10 minutes minimize the risk of injury. The additional stress of an increase of about 10% per week to the long run can be readily added, resulting in a great improvement in the endurance capabilities of the runner. The gradual buildup of distance requires a recovery period after the longer runs. The recovery period can really be enhanced and improved by doing walk-runs during the long run. This improved recovery allows the runner to feel refreshed and ready to run on the shorter midweek runs. By doing the long runs continuously, the runner needs extra rest prior to running again.

The fast, brisk walk provides a gentle and specific stretch to the leg muscles. Sports medicine professionals all encourage and recommend that we stretch our muscles. The stretch provides for more supple muscles with improved range of motion. Strong, flexible muscles will perform better. Think of the walking breaks as "stretch breaks." The stretch can be felt from the hip flexors through the hamstrings, quadriceps, and down into the calves and assorted muscles of the ankle and foot.

The combination of stress and rest is the foundation of any good training program. The rest provides recovery and a rebuilding phase of improvement. The brisk walking breaks provide a phase of active rest. The active rest does two things:

- The active rest keeps the runner moving forward. Our studies indicate that the average runner will lose less than 15 seconds per kilometer by doing walk-run rather than continuous running. The runner attempting to run continuously will also slow down near the end of the long run. The walk-runner, on the other hand, is able to maintain the pace throughout the long run distance without the dramatic slow down of pace.
- The active rest helps flush the lactic acid out of our large muscle groups. As we approach our anaerobic threshold, which is 85% of our maximum heart rate, our body starts producing lactic acid. This leaves us feeling heavy-legged with a queasy stomach. The walk-run combinations of active rest will help dissipate this lactic acid build up.

Drop into any of the Running Room's practice runs across North America on a Sunday morning and join in with one of the pace groups doing the walk-run, as well as the long run. There will be a continuous run group heading out, but I highly recommend you join in the larger walk-run group. The walk-run gang are much more social and have a great deal more fun on their long runs. In addition, they break the long run distance into a series of achievable goals while having a fun time. They run 10 minutes and brisk walk for one minute.

Walking breaks work! Try them and you will become a 10 and 1 believer!