

Basic skill elements for Running Form

Below is a step by step guide to running with more efficiency and less stress. This is particularly useful if you are recovering from injury, as your recovery will be quicker if you are running with good form.

Limp calves and feet

When your feet are off the ground whilst running they should be loose and dangling, with no tension in them whatsoever. These two exercises will help you sense what it should feel like to do this. Then practice on your next run releasing tension from the lower legs.

- Stand on one leg. Shake the other leg and foot, as if you are kicking something, and feel the tension drain from your calf and foot. Do this for about 15 seconds. Repeat a few times on each leg. You should eventually get to the point where you can make your foot and calf go limp the moment they leave the ground.
- When you're sitting watching TV at home, kick your shoes off, put your feet up, and concentrate on identifying if there is any tension in your feet. If there is, just let go of that tension.

Foot strike

Most people when they run land on their heels with their foot in front of their body. If you think about it this only causes you to brake, since each time your foot lands on the floor it is exerting pressure against you running. It also makes you prone to injury from the excessive impact on your joints.



When your foot lands on the ground, it is really important that it is either underneath your body or just behind it. You should feel as if your feet are underneath/behind you pretty much most of the time (do you remember the cartoon character the 'road runner'?). Remember, however, not to land on or push off from you toes (this is where shin and calf problems originate).

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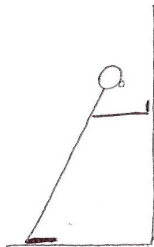
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Short and fast strides

The optimum 'cadence' is 170-180 foot strikes per minute. That means that your left foot and right foot each hit the floor between 85 and 90 times per minute. It is very useful getting a digital metronome to help you with this, or to remember that for a cadence of 180 that means 3 foot strikes per second. In order to use this frequency comfortably you will need to take shorter strides. Remember this will not slow you down, you will end up going faster!

Lean forward

This means that you will be using gravity to propel you forward rather than using effort, but it is important to lean forward with your whole body, not just bending at your waist. It is also crucial not to run on your toes when you lean forward, the following exercise helps you to feel what it is like to lean forward without causing pressure on the toes.



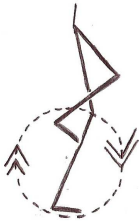
- Stand a metre away from a wall. Feet comfortable and relaxed and hands hanging loosely by your sides.
- Let your ankles relax completely, allowing your body to topple towards the wall. Put your hands out in front of you to stop you falling into the wall!
- Feel that your body weight is going through the back of your leg and through the heels, and you should feel hardly any pressure through the balls of your feet.
- When your hands stop you, your body should be as straight as it was when you were in the starting position, so no bending either backwards or forwards at the waist (you might want to employ a friend to take a photo of you to check you've got it right).
- Practice this many times, it is very important that you keep the body aligned whilst you lean forward and run.
- Remember though, not to lean too far forward or you will find yourself thumping your foot on the ground each time you take a step (i.e. your legs won't be fast enough to cope with the amount of lean).

Glide along

Watch any great runner, and you will see that they appear to glide effortlessly along, without bouncing up and down, with light steps. This is what we should aspire to. All of your effort should be directed forward. There should be very little up and down motion. Runners that bounce or hop when they run are wasting energy. They are also putting excessive stress on the knees, hip and back. Imagine you are running with a beanbag on your head. If you bounce too much the beanbag will fall off.

Pick up your feet (not your knees)

Learn to pick up your feet by imagining that your feet are on the pedals of a mini bicycle, doing circles. It's a good idea to practice this whilst walking. It'll feel like you are walking strangely, but ask anyone else and they won't notice anything strange.



If you have difficulty visualising this, then just make sure that each foot picks up and over the opposite ankle bone. You can imagine that there is a stick coming horizontally out from each ankle bone and that you must clear this stick with your foot each time you take a step.

Use your arms

Best to have elbows bent at a right angle, and a loose fist. Rather than your elbows swinging in front, think about swinging them to the back – this is more efficient and will allow you to lean naturally forward. Also try not to cross the midline of your body with your hands, they should stay in a fairly straight line – like a train!