



3 Technique Tips All Runners Should Consider

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Running form and form analysis are hot topics these days. While form analysis at a running lab may have its benefits, it's certainly not a necessity to learn the basics of efficient running technique.

Beginners and advanced runners alike can learn how to make subtle, but effective, changes to their form to help their runs feel easier and more efficient.

Running technique should never be forced. Trying to make too many changes to your natural running form too soon can make you less efficient and more injury prone. Focus on subtle cues rather than forced changes. This allows you to make gradual changes that optimize your form rather than trying to force yourself to change unnecessarily.

WHY TECHNIQUE MATTERS

Look at a variety of elite runners, and you'll see there is no "ideal" running form that suits every person. Boston Marathon winner and Olympian Meb Keflezighi is widely considered to have virtually impeccable form, while others such as women's marathon record holder Paula Radcliffe have a more unorthodox style.

If that's the case, why does form matter? Here's why:

- **Repetition:** Running is a repetitive sport that places a great deal of stress on your body. While running form is not directly linked to [injury](#), some variations in form place more stress on areas of your body that might cause you to break down over time.
- **Ease:** For both new and advanced runners, good technique should help running feel easier. Despite how much form can vary, there are a few concepts that can benefit us all, such as running tall and landing lightly.
- **Efficiency:** Ideally, any change you make to your running form should help you [run more efficiently](#). This means you can run faster and farther with less effort. While some of this is a result of muscle memory that comes over years of training, changes in form may help expedite this process.

TECHNIQUE TIPS

1. FIND YOUR OPTIMAL POSTURE

If you were told, "Don't slouch!" as a teenager, you may find you need to apply this lesson to your running. While a forced, stiff, upright posture isn't ideal, running tall and relaxed helps optimize your form. Running relaxed may be easier said than done, but tension anywhere in your body makes you less efficient. Try to relax your shoulders and arms and avoid clenching your hands into tight fists.



As fatigue creeps in, it's easy for your form to deteriorate and you may become hunched. Try to focus on running tall, almost as if someone is pulling a string from the top of your head. Your body should have a slight forward lean that starts at your ankles and keeps your body in alignment, rather than bending forward from your waist. These minor tweaks make it easier to address the next two techniques: cadence and foot landing.

2. CONSIDER YOUR CADENCE

[Running cadence](#) refers to the number of steps you take per minute. To find your current cadence, count the number of times your left foot hits the ground in a minute, then double that number to get the total for both feet. You may have heard 180 steps per minute is the “magic number” when it comes to running efficiency. As with all aspects of form, there isn't one number for everyone.

Increasing your cadence has been shown to decrease the impact on your hip and knee joints, which may make you less prone to injury. Most recreational runners have a cadence between 150–170, while elites are often 180 or more.

If your cadence is less than 160, try to gradually increase it. Think about “quick feet” rather than consciously shortening your stride. Start by increasing it 5–10% (157–165 if it's currently 150), and then building from there once you're comfortably consistent.

3. FOOT LANDING VERSUS FOOT STRIKE

[Foot strike](#) – whether you land on your heel, midfoot or forefoot – tends to get all the attention when you read about running technique. Heel striking is often vilified while a midfoot strike may be touted as ideal.

Despite all the hoopla over footstrike, this isn't the best place to focus your efforts. Instead, think about letting your feet land underneath your body as you run. Don't “reach” with your lower legs – try to keep your stride short and your feet underneath you (rather than in front of you) as you run.

When you focus on your feet landing underneath you, your stride naturally shortens. This helps you avoid overstriding and the kind of aggressive heel striking that can place increased stress on your knees and other joints. Focus on keeping your feet active and moving lightly and quickly. This can also benefit your cadence.

Technique is an important part of healthy, efficient running, but don't let it overwhelm you! Use the tips above to gently optimize your form and your running will benefit.