



# Improve Your Running

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*Simple changes will yield big results*

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Part I of II

Improving your running form and increasing your speed can be accomplished with a few simple changes to your training plan and your mental approach to who you are as a runner. I hear all the time “I can’t run because it beats up my body”. Running doesn’t *beat up* your body, poor form and instabilities *beat up* your body. By improving your core strength and hip stabilization with functional training you will improve your body’s ability to load and unload as you run. Additionally, simple changes to the way in which you carry you’re your arms, lean your body and foot strike can make a big difference in your performance. The last component to running fast is your mind. Running is a state of mind, think you are slow runner and you will be slow.

## **Functional Training to improve your body’s ability to handle stress**

Think about the force which moves through your body with each stride you take. Your bodies weight is supported on one foot while in motion. Running is a horizontal transfer of body weight and a number of muscles are recruited during this process, a few are listed below.

**Quadricep** (which are made up of 4 muscles and are involved in hip flexion and knee extension)

**Hamstring and Buttocks** (again 4 major muscles which also move 2 joins, hip extention and knee flexion)

**Gastrocnemius and Soleus** (which are involved in the movement of the knee and the ankle.

**Core:** Includes muscles of the torso with back, and abdominal muscles, (*Rectus Abdominis, External Abdominal Oblique, Internal Abdominal Oblique and Transversus Abdominis*) the hip and thigh muscles. It goes without saying that these muscles are important as a structural foundation for the movement of the body when running.

Basically put, we need to strengthen the muscles mentioned above in order to become more stable when we run. One of the most common faults I see when watching runners is “dropped hip”. The supporting muscles are not strong enough to place the body in proper position and the hip drops causing misalignments and causes stress. Eventually, something wears down from always having to compensate and injury occurs.

By improving core strength and incorporating exercises with movements which always connect one body part to another (another reason I am a big advocate of the TRX <http://www.fitnessanywhere.com/sfnt?AFFIL=yio8dP38>) we improve our bodies coordination and ability to handle the stresses placed on it while running. For our clients who don't use the TRX, I have them complete a simple routine which emphasizes core and hip stabilization. In addition to the functional strength and stabilization work, incorporate running drills and have your running form analyzed by your coach and in a short period of time you will notice improvements in your running form and post run fatigue.

## **Body Positioning:**

I've analyzed a number of runners over the years and without question, very few people think about the way they carry their arms, lean their body or how their foot strikes the ground, recovery or where they look. Some of these are quick fixes, while other require changing muscle memory patterns. Through video and still picture photos you can get a good idea of what you look like when you run (contact me if you are interested in having your running analyzed). Running drills can change the way in which you run and should be incorporated into your training as part of your warm up and as standalone workouts. If you do not have a standard warm up which includes muscle activation and running drills you aren't assisting yourself in becoming a more efficient runner and are increasing your risk of injury.

Some points to keep in mind when you run

- Lean from your ankles, don't bend at your hip. Your vertical lean should be 10% (think falling forward)
- Arms are held at 90's and the elbow move straight back and forth. Your arms provide balance and should be relaxed (same thing with your hands)
- Your gaze is 10-12 yards ahead (not at your feet and not at the horizon)
- Shoulders remain relaxed and don't rotate while you run
- Land mid foot (I will cover the foot strike in Part II of this article)
- Place your thumb on the top of your fist and point in the direction you are running. Keep fists loose not tight.

For the Mile High Multisport athletes reading this article, the coaches tips section in your workout log account covers specific core work (including pictures and descriptions), a running stabilization routine (pictures and explanation as well), muscle activation and a proper warm up routine. Spend more time “thinking” about your running as opposed to just doing. It will take time to change muscle memory, but with some dedication and a willingness to change, anything is possible.

In Part II of this article, I will go into more detail on foot strike/recovery, pacing strategies and having the proper mind set to become a faster runner.

*Pete Alfino is a level II certified triathlon coach and the founder of Mile High Multisport, LLC. Pete and his coaching staff provided individualized training plans for triathletes from beginners to novice. Pete also conducts private swim and run analysis. Contact him via his webpage at [www.milehighmultisport.com](http://www.milehighmultisport.com)*