



## How to Run Fast–Fast

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One of the more common mistakes that recreational runners make is moving up to long races too quickly. After a few months of running, they set a goal of running a marathon and begin adding a lot of distance to their workouts. That's all well and good if you're interested in simply completing a marathon or half marathon. But if your goal is to increase your speed and actually race, you must build a base of speed work before moving up to high-mileage training.

This philosophy is not new. As anyone who ran track in high school or college will attest, track athletes typically start by running quarter mile or 800 and then move up in distance after they've trained their bodies to run fast. No coach worth his salt would let an athlete jump right into the 5,000 or 10,000 without first having him race the 800 or mile. So why do so many recreational runners do just that?

One key to improving your race times at all distances is to do consistent speed work. This can take the form of intervals on the track, tempo runs or fartlek. If you have access to a track or a treadmill, the best way to increase your speed is with intervals. Here's a simple plan that has worked well for me:

1. Go short. Begin with weekly interval workouts comprising 10 or 12 200 meter repeats at a fairly hard pace with a jog recovery of equal distance. You should finish the last one feeling like you could do a few more. Think of this pace as about 45 seconds per mile faster than your 5k pace. Do not start too fast. Volume is more important than speed at this stage. But you should be gradually increasing the pace each week as you gain strength. You may also want to add one or two repeats each week. (If you need help figuring what pace to run, try this [pace calculator at McMillan Running](#).)
2. Move along. After 4-6 weeks, move up to quarter-mile repeats. The idea is the same, but the pace should be slightly slower, about 30 seconds per mile faster

than 5k pace. Again, start with 10 or 12 repeats and jog an equal distance between repeats. You can add more repeats as you see fit.

3. Half time. At this point, you'll have 8-12 weeks of solid speed work under your belt and you should have a good feel for your pace. Next up is 800 meter repeats. Start with a lower volume, perhaps 6-8 repeats for the first couple of weeks, and then add one or two if you feel up to it. The pace is only a second or two per lap slower than the pace for the 400s, so these will feel harder than the previous distances.
4. Back that thing up. After a few weeks of 800s, take a week or two break from the repeats and then drop back down to 200s for two or three weeks. This will give you a chance to test out your newfound speed and also will give your body a break from the longer repeats.

Be sure to run a good warmup of at least two miles before these workouts and at least a mile as a cooldown afterward. The idea behind all of this is simple: You must train your body to run fast over shorter distances before you can try to run fast over long distances. First speed, then distance. I followed this general plan this fall and cut 45 seconds off my 5k time within three months