

# Tips for Trail Running

Although trail running is similar to running on the roads, there are some differences to make note of before you hit the trail. But fair warning: They say that once you go dirty, you may never go back!



**Trail Running is Harder.** Running off road can be exhausting at first, and it may take you up to twice as long as your normal run, especially in the early stages of training. It's wise to leave your ego at home, slow your pace, and focus on finding a new rhythm. Trail running requires constantly changing foot placements, subtle changes of direction and as a consequence you are using your muscles differently. It takes time and practise to get into the rhythm of trail running.

**Allow yourself more time to cover the distance.** Your trail running pace will be slower than your road running pace. Make sure you allow yourself more time to complete a set distance.

**Safety First.** Always be aware of what's going on around you. Run with a friend if you can or at least tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back. Take a mobile phone (with a trail map on it), some ID and some water with you. Consider downloading one of the many safety apps on your phone.



**Stick to the Trail.** Always stay on the marked trails. Avoid bush bashing as this increases the risk of tripping, falling or running into one of nature's nasties!

**Eyes on the Trail.** It can be tempting to look straight down at your feet or gaze at the nature around you, but doing so can quickly lead to tripping and falling. If you want to enjoy the sights, walk or stop; otherwise, focus on looking three to four feet ahead to create a line of travel, or where you are going to step for the next few strides. This will keep you focused and in the moment—one of the true gifts of trail running. It's as much of a physical puzzle as it is a mental one. You will begin to instinctively know where that line is as you become more comfortable running on the trails.

**Slow Down and Enjoy the Sights.** Running on trails can be a lot more demanding than the roads, especially if it's a technical singletrack trail with roots, rocks, and other fun obstacles. It is best to avoid comparing your pace, as you will be slower than your normal road-running pace. Instead, slow your pace and develop a trail tempo. Run by your effort level, by your heart rate, and by the tune of your body. For new trail runners, that may mean walking the hills and running the downhills and flats. Why not stop and take a few photos along the way!

**Let the Terrain Determine Your Pace.** Adjust your pace according to the terrain and maintain a consistent effort level as you climb uphill. When in doubt, walk. Running over downed trees or through mud and sand takes some time getting used to, and it's best to progress slowly. Tackling obstacles will get easier as your body gets stronger and more seasoned on trails.

**It's OK to Walk.** Take short, quick steps when going up hills and use your arms. Some hills are meant to be walked, especially on the technical trails. Tell your ego that even the professional runners walk the hills and run the downs and flats - it's okay to walk! For gradual downhills on groomed trails, lean into the downhill, open up your stride, and let the hill pull you down. For technical downhills or steep hills, it's better to use a stair-stepping motion instead; move in a similar motion as you would running down a flight of stairs, keeping your torso tall and letting your legs to do all the work.

**Enjoy and Have Fun!** Trail running is a lot more fun and interesting than road running. Make sure you enjoy the experience as well as having a good workout!

