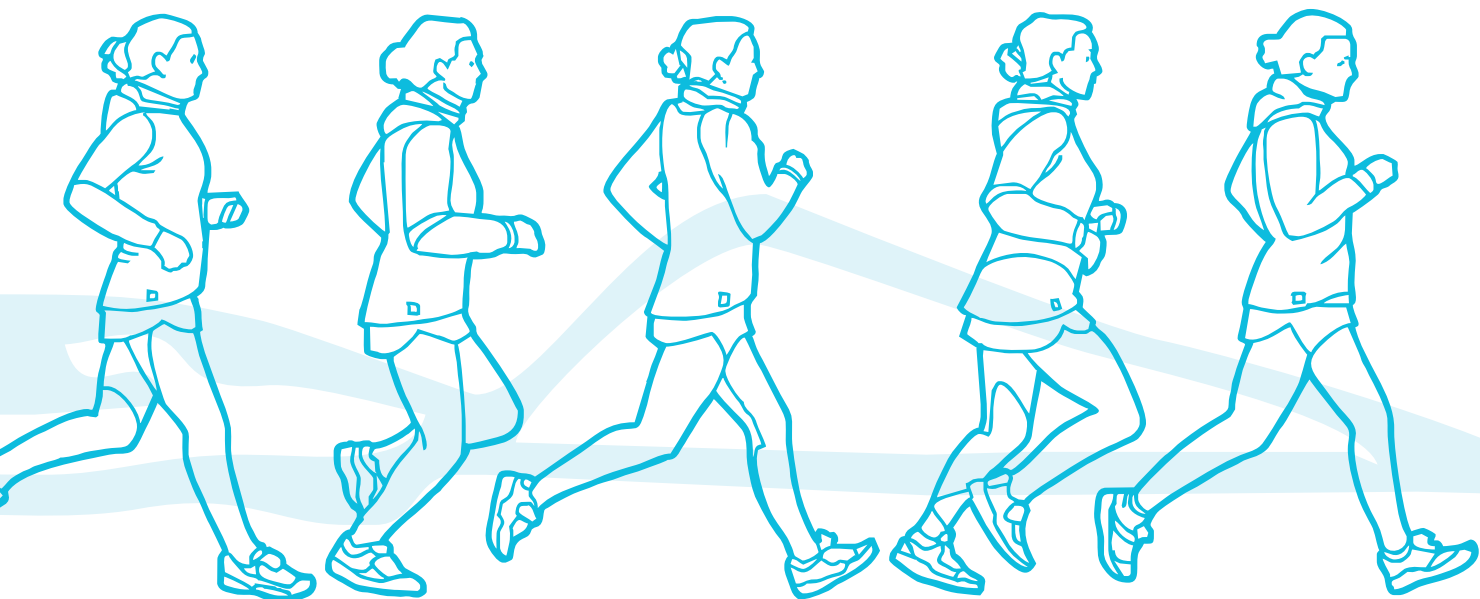


FUNCTIONAL FORM

4 FIXES TO IMPROVE YOUR RUNNING MECHANICS



STRAIGHT LEG

FORM FIX 1: Run Tall

Why do you do it?

Taking a top-down approach to running form and aligning the head, shoulders, torso, hips and legs promotes balance and allows your foot to land under your center of gravity—regardless of what part of your foot strikes the ground first. “Telling someone to run tall is like telling them to sit up straight,” McMillan says. “It stacks the posture properly and gives your mechanics the best opportunity to work correctly.”

How do you do it?

Simply giving yourself the cue to “run tall” while you’re running can help straighten out 90 to 95 percent of inefficiencies, McMillan says. However, incorporating drills such as straight-leg running after easy runs will encourage you to stay upright while getting more leg extension from behind and landing squarely underneath your body.

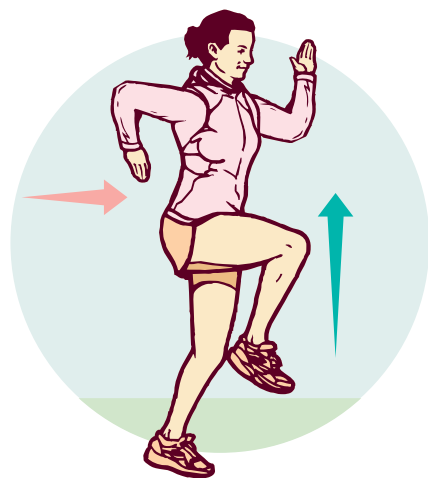
Straight-Leg Running:

Keeping your legs straight and your ankles dorsiflexed, pointing upward, run forward landing on your mid-foot, but do not let your feet lift too high off the ground. Maintain a straight torso, and focus on executing a quick turnover and landing directly underneath your center of gravity. Perform two 50-meter reps as part of your warm-up routine before setting out for a run, progressing to four as you build coordination.



BUTT KICKS

FORM FIX 2: Shorten Your Stride, Increase Your Cadence



HIGH KNEES

Why do you do it?

Making a conscious effort to shorten your stride and employ a quicker turnover encourages you to land lighter. This reduces the impact forces on your legs, regardless of how your feet strike the ground, and lessens the likelihood of injury.

How do you do it?

Butt kicks and high knees are two effective drills that encourage a shorter stride and quicker cadence.

Butt Kicks:

Using short strides—almost as if you were running in place—lift your knees slightly and try to bring your heel directly under your butt—not behind—with each stride. Alternate legs rapidly, focusing on executing a quick turnover. Perform two 15-meter reps, progressing to 30-meter reps as your coordination improves.

High Knees:

Running in place, lift your knees to waist level while landing lightly on your forefoot directly underneath you. Stay tall and don't lean too far backward or forward. Perform one 15-second set, progressing to two to three sets with 15 seconds of rest in between as coordination improves.



FORM FIX 3: Practice Sprinting

Why do you do it?

Sprinting short distances helps strengthen tendons and connective tissue while improving your basic speed and power. "It's a misnomer that efficient equals fast," Magness says. "Even the best runners will give up a small amount of efficiency to be powerful and cover ground quickly."

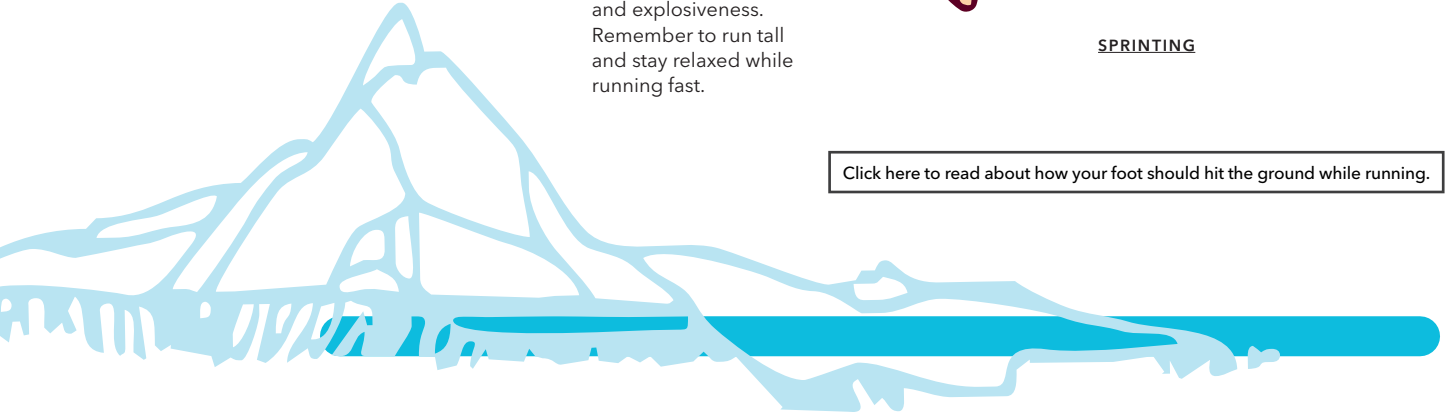
How do you do it?

One to two times a week after an easy run, practice sprinting for 10 to 15 seconds at close to top speed. Repeat this sequence 8 to 10 times, with one to two minutes of recovery between reps. Performing short sprints on a moderately steep hill (6 to 8 percent grade) will help recruit more muscle fibers and accelerate gains in tendon strength and explosiveness. Remember to run tall and stay relaxed while running fast.

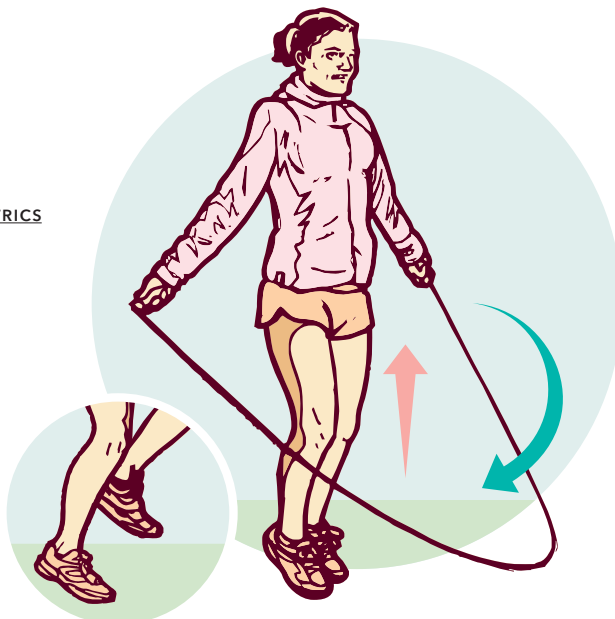


SPRINTING

[Click here to read about how your foot should hit the ground while running.](#)



PLYOMETRICS



FORM FIX 4: Start Doing Plyometrics

Why do you do it?

Do explosive jumping drills two to three times a week while you're building up mileage to stiffen tendons and develop your body's ability to make better use of energy return. It will help you run faster and prevent your form from breaking down. "Plyos teach you how to efficiently navigate the ground without thinking about it," Magness says. "That translates to more speed and improved mechanics."

How do you do it?

Keep it simple. Jump rope for 5 to 10 minutes three times a week as part of your warm-up before running. Alternate between two-legged hops, one-legged hops and alternating feet. Keep your feet directly underneath your hips and focus on coming off the ground with quick feet (pretend you're standing on hot coals), whether you're landing on the balls of your feet or your heels.