

# Runners Training Guide

YOUR GUIDE TO PREPARING  
FOR AN ULTRA CHALLENGE



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# Runners Training Guide

## About the author

Action Challenge are pleased to have partnered with Matt Buck from Running Adventures to supply you with all the training guidance and advice you could possibly need before taking on this awesome challenge.

Matt is a Salomon sponsored ultra-runner, adventurer and UK Athletics qualified coach who has been guiding people through challenge events for over 10 years. Matt coaches ultra-runners of all abilities, from first timers to podium chasers.

Matt has also completed a huge number of ultra-running races and challenges, including some of the toughest races on earth such as the Marathon Des Sables and Dragons Back Race.

## Introduction

Signing up to an Ultra Challenge run is a huge event in itself, whether you are a first timer or an experienced endurance athlete, the sense of excitement, nervousness and anticipation is always there. We want to challenge ourselves; we want to see what we are capable of and we want to experience something truly extraordinary, and more than anything, we want to succeed, we *need* to succeed.



Whatever your goals are for the race, crossing that finish line is your motivation for the next few months in the lead up to your Ultra Challenge. Preparation is key to achieving that success, it's time to start a journey that will end with you having a medal hung around your neck, proud of everything that you have accomplished.

Over the next few pages, we will cover everything you need to know and/or consider to make your Ultra Challenge a success. Preparing for an Ultra doesn't need to be complicated or all time consuming, but you will need to be dedicated and focused. This guide will give you all the tools you require to be a success.

## Key Terms Explained

### Aerobic

Used to refer to running or other exercise at an intensity that's sufficiently easy for your respiratory and cardiovascular systems to deliver all or most of the oxygen required by your muscles, and slow enough that lactic acid doesn't appreciably build up in your muscles.



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Generally, you can sustain a slow aerobic pace for long periods of time, provided you have the endurance to go long distances.

### Anaerobic

Used to refer to running or other exercise at an intensity that makes it impossible for your respiratory and cardiovascular systems to deliver all or most of the oxygen required by your muscles, and fast enough that lactic acid begins to build up in your muscles, thus producing a tired, heavy feeling. The pace associated with anaerobic running cannot be sustained very long.

### Anaerobic threshold (AT)

The transition phase between aerobic and anaerobic running. Good training will increase AT by teaching the muscles to use oxygen more efficiently, so that less lactic acid is produced. Also known as "lactate threshold."

### Comfortable pace

This should be close to your (predicted) challenge PB pace. Your challenge pace should always feel comfortable, and training at this pace will work on and improve your endurance and aerobic systems.

### Cool-down

Slow running after a workout loosens muscles and rids the body of lactic acid.

### DOMS

Delayed onset muscle soreness. This type of muscle soreness normally peaks about 48 hours after a particularly intense or long run.

### Easy pace

This is exactly as it says; it should feel very easy, almost too easy. This is used purely for recovery runs.

### Fartlek

Swedish for "speed play;" variable pace running; a mixture of slow running, running at a moderate pace and short, fast bursts. Fartlek training is a "creative way" to increase speed and endurance.

### Hill reps

Hill reps are strength training for runners. A hill rep session will involve repeatedly running up and down a hill over a designated period of time or distance. During hill reps, you should focus on a running technique which has vigorous arm drive and high knee lift, with the hips kept high, so that you are 'running tall', not leaning forwards.

### Intervals

Training in which short, fast "repeats" or "repetitions", are alternated with slow



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"intervals" of jogging for recovery. Interval training builds speed and endurance.

### Lactic acid

A substance which forms in the muscles as a result of the incomplete breakdown of glucose. Lactic acid is associated with muscle fatigue and sore muscles.

### Negative splits

Running the second half of a race faster than the first half.

### Plyometrics

Bounding exercises: any jumping exercise in which landing followed by a jump occurs.

### Taper

Runners usually cut back distance (or taper) one day to three weeks (depending on race distance) before a big race. Tapering helps muscles rest so that they are ready for peak performance on race day.

### Tempo runs

A tempo run's purpose is to improve your anaerobic threshold; tempo pace should be run at a near maximum effort level. Increasing your anaerobic threshold level allows the body to run at faster speeds before fatigue takes over. Therefore, you should run your tempo runs at a 5k pace. The tempo run will never get easier; you will just get faster.

Your tempo run pace is supposed to be ambitious, it should even seem and feel almost unachievable, it is this session where you need to push yourself to the max. If it's realistic and easy then you won't find that extra few % to go faster. With this in mind, please never feel bad if you don't quite hit your target pace.

A simple way to look at your tempo run is to simply work hard to beat your previous best time.

### Ultra-pace

This is a pace to aim for during long runs when training. This pace is super slow as it takes into account the fact that you will be both running and walking. It's essentially a 'keep moving' pace and is aimed at stopping you going too fast than anything else.

### Up the Clock

As the name suggests, a session based on set time spans. After warming up, run one minute hard followed by one minute easy; then two minutes hard, two minutes easy; three minutes hard three minutes easy, and so on.

### Warm-up

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A period of easy running before a race or a workout begins. The point of a warm-up is to raise one's heart rate so the body (and its muscles) are looser before a tough workout begins.



### Plan your training

Most things in life end much better with proper planning, and the preparation for your Ultra Challenge is no different.

Plan your training carefully. The key to training well for an Ultra Challenge of any distance is to be patient and build up slowly. Rushing your training and building up the mileage too quickly is likely to end in injury and disappointment. Don't leave your training to the last few weeks, give yourself enough time to build your mileage up sensibly.

It's a good idea to sit down with your diary and plan your training carefully. There are so many resources available online that you can use as a guide for what you should be doing, but remember to balance it around your work, family and other commitments. It's no good just grabbing the plan then realising 10 weeks down the line that you have family engagements or work over all the weekends of high mileage running, because you simply won't do the sessions and your training will suffer as a result.

Feel free to (within reason) move things around to suit your life and keep things realistic. It's important to plan your time carefully, look at how you will manage to do all the training. It might mean early mornings or shooting out for a quick lunchtime run, work out the best way to do the best training you possibly can with the time that you have at your disposal.

### Get used to running trails

Almost all of the Ultra Challenge series routes are run on trails. If you're used to running on roads then now is the time to start testing yourself in this new environment. Running on trails is considerably different to running on roads, it will be slower than you are used to and you will need to use every muscle in your body to tackle various types of terrain. Here are some top tips for successful trail running.

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- Look where you're going!
- Don't assume that you can run at your road speed.
- Be aware of walkers, mountain bikers, horse riders and anyone else sharing the trails with you.
- Wear appropriate footwear, invest in some good trail running shoes, they really do make a huge difference.
- Take emergency kit with you, it's always worth carrying at least a phone, waterproof jacket, and foil blanket at all times.
- Pace yourself on the hills
- Respect the countryside, don't litter and close all gates.

*If you are new to trail running then you might want to consider joining one of our training runs, the perfect opportunity to learn everything you need to know. See the Participant's Area of the websites for more details.*



### Pre and Post Run Advice

**There are a couple of simple things we can do pre and post run to help us run better, recover faster, and stay injury free.**

#### Stretching

Everyone hates stretching, after a long run the last thing you feel like doing is standing around while you hold that perfect stretch, however it is important to stretch to avoid injury. Here are a few tips and examples of some stretches you can do before and after a run.

#### Before -DYNAMIC stretching

Dynamic stretching loosens and activates your muscles ready for your run. There are a couple of simple dynamic stretches that you can do wherever you are, ready for your run. Both these dynamic stretches loosen up and activate all your leg muscles, inner and outer thighs, hips, hamstrings, calves and quadriceps, through full range of motion.

#### Leg Swings

Hold onto a sturdy object, stand on one leg and simply swing the other leg forwards and backwards, your range of movement should improve as you begin to loosen up those muscles and points. Do 20, swap legs and do another 20.



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### Walking lunges

**This is a fun one to do when in a public space...** Take a large step forward with your right leg and bend the knee until your thigh is parallel to the floor and knee is aligned with your ankle, do not go beyond this point or you will cause damage to your knee. Push back upward, draw your left foot even with your right and step forward with the left. Do 20 in total (10 on each side).

### Heel kicks

Slowly run forward kick your heels up to touch your bum, ensure that your hands and arms are still moving as they would be if you were running. Do this for approx. 20 seconds.

### After - STATIC stretching

When you have finished your run, don't just stop. Ensure that you slow your running pace before having a short walk to finish. You will then be ready to do some static stretching.

The following stretches target the major leg muscles to maintain healthy flexibility and range of motion. Hold all stretches for 30 seconds on each side.

**Kneeling hip flexor and hamstring:** From a kneeling position, plant the right foot on the ground in front of you, so the leg is bent 90 degrees, with the knee and ankle aligned.

Keeping your back straight, press forward into your right hip while keeping your left knee pressed into the ground, stretching your left hip and right hamstring. To increase the stretch to the left hip flexors, squeeze and contract the glute muscles of your left hip.

**Standing quad:** Stand with legs together. Bend your left leg, bringing your heel toward your butt, and grasp your left foot with your left hand. Press your shoelaces into your hand, so that your leg does the stretching instead of pulling up with your hand.

**Standing calf:** Stand facing a wall with your hands on the wall at about chest level. Placing the ball of your right foot up against the wall, heel touching the floor, gently lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in your calf while keeping your leg straight.

### Refuel

It is essential to refuel within 30 minutes of finishing your run, especially after a longer run as this is when the body needs fuel the most. Doing so will ensure that you look after yourself properly and get the most out of your training.

The easiest and most simple way to refuel after a long run is to drink a sports drink. It's worth noting that this doesn't need to be an officially marketed sports drink, there are many cheaper alternatives. I personally recommend milkshakes – it can be any one you like!

Whatever you choose, ensure you have it as soon as you can after your run, it really makes a huge difference to recovery.

### Ice Baths!!!!



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The dreaded ice bath, some people hate them, some people love them! All I can say is that



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they really do work!

Try and jump into an ice bath as soon as you can after your run (I generally only do this after long runs), you will really feel the difference it makes.

You don't actually need any ice! Your 'ice bath' doesn't actually require any ice, water from the cold tap is perfectly sufficient. Now put some loud music on, grit your teeth, jump in and try and stay in for up to 10 minutes, start with less time on your first few goes, trust me it gets easier.

Once you get the first minute out the way, it's actually quite a nice feeling! I like to follow an ice bath with a warm bath, it's time to relax, and your training for the day is done.



### Training plans for 100 & 50km – things to consider

Training plans are designed to get you to the finish line in one piece, regardless of speed. It doesn't matter what level of runner you are, you should be able to follow your plans, so long as you have a good base fitness to begin with. **You should be able to comfortably run at least a half marathon before considering training for a 50k or 100k ultra-run.**

There are a huge selection of plans out there, some are free and very good and some can come at quite a cost with very little information. Below are some key things to consider when establishing your training plan.

- Always try to do your long runs on trails.
- Feel free to move sessions to suit your needs.
- Although not ideal, it is fine to split longer midweek sessions over multiple runs if it means you can then fit it around work etc. For example, with a 20km midweek run, you might consider 10km before work and 10km after work.
- Avoid Hill Training sessions at your peril!
- If you miss the odd session, don't panic, simply continue to the next session.
- ENJOY THE TRAINING...this is when you earn your own sense of achievement.

Good plans will run over at least a 16-week period (you may wish to do more or less dependent on the base level of fitness you start at). You will need to calculate when you need to start following the plan based on when your race is.

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If you are partaking in either distance (50km or 100km) you should increase the weekly distance slowly, focusing primarily on endurance while also focusing on strength and increasing speed.



If you ever feel particularly fatigued or start to feel an injury developing, then ease off the plan and seek the help of a physio - listen to what your body is telling you.

Back-to-back runs later on in your training plan are vitally important to training. These increase your endurance while reducing the risk of injury or overtraining. It is important to do these runs on trails if you can.

Every few weeks you will enjoy a rest week, this is a chance to recover and recuperate from the training you have been doing, it's vital that you take some rest weeks, even if you don't feel as though you need it!

You may also wish to consider various aspects of cross-training in your plan (for example swimming or cycling). This is a great way to vary your training and use different muscles. However, you must prioritise runs over anything else!

### Recommendations once you've found the right plan for you

1. Download it – have it somewhere easily accessible (think of the environment before printing off though!)
2. Insert key personal appointments that may prevent you from training on a particular day (weddings, birthdays etc.)
3. Work out your 'pace windows':
  - a. your tempo pace should be around your 5km time.
  - b. your comfortable pace between your half marathon or marathon time.
  - c. your easy pace is exactly that - easy.
  - d. your ultra-pace will be similar to your easy pace target and is aimed at stopping you going too fast rather than too slow.
4. Record the distance you ran against each session, and your average pace, this will enable you to monitor your progress, offering a fantastic motivational boost as you tick-off each week. Remember to keep in mind that often your progress won't be linear, there will be weeks with no progress and then consecutive days with lots.
5. Record any key notes from your runs, like if a run felt really good, or really bad. Then consider why this might have happened and learn from it.

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## Train your Core

In addition to running, it is important to work on your core strength, doing this means you will be able to run stronger, for longer. Do this at least once a week at home or in the gym.

### Superman

**What It Hits:** transversus abdominis (deep abs) & erector spinae (lower back)

Start face down on the floor, with your arms and legs extended out front. Raise your head, your left arm, and right leg about five inches off the floor. Hold for three counts, then lower. Repeat with your right arm and left leg. Do up to 10 reps on each side.

**Keep It Honest:** Don't raise your shoulders too much.

**Make It Harder:** Lift both arms and legs at the same time.



### Bridge

**What It Hits:** glutes and hamstrings

Lie face up on the floor, with your knees bent 90 degrees, your feet on the floor. Lift your hips and back off the floor until your body forms a straight line from your shoulders to your knees. Hold for five to 10 seconds. Lower to the floor and repeat 10 to 12 times.

**Keep It Honest:** Squeeze your glutes and don't let your spine sag.

**Make It Harder:** Straighten one leg once your hips are lifted.



### Metronome

**What It Hits:** obliques

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Lie face up on the floor with your knees bent and raised over your hips, with your ankles parallel to the ground, your feet lifted, and your arms extended outward. Rotate your legs to the left side, bringing your knees as close to the floor as possible without touching.

Return to the center, then move your knees to the right side. Do 10 to 12 reps on each side.

**Keep It Honest:** Make sure not to swing your hips or use momentum; start the movement from your core and continue to move slowly from side to side.

**Make It Harder:** Keep your legs straight.



### Plank Lift

**What It Hits:** transversus abdominis and lower back

Begin face down on the floor, propped up on your forearms, with knees and feet together. With your elbows under your shoulders, lift your torso, legs, and hips in a straight line from head to heels. Hold for 10 seconds. Raise your right leg a few inches, keeping the rest of the body still. Lower and repeat with your left leg.

**Keep It Honest:** Pull in your belly and don't let your hips sag.

**Make It Harder:** Extend the time of the exercise. Each time you lift your leg, hold it for 15 to 20 seconds.



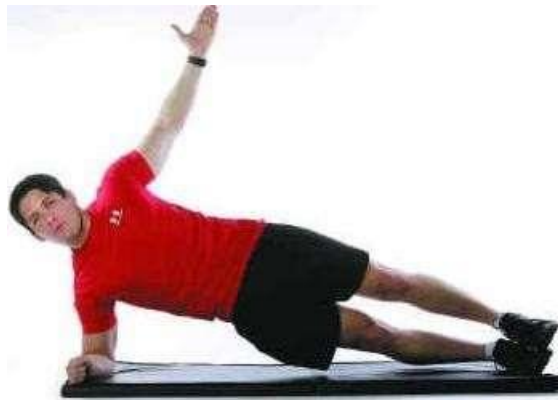
### Side Plank

**What It Hits:** Oblique's, transversus abdominis, lower back, hips, and glutes

Lie on your right side, supporting your upper body on your right forearm, with your left arm at your left side. Lift your hips and, keeping your body weight supported on the forearm and the side of the right foot, extend your left arm above your shoulder. Hold this position for 10 to 30 seconds. Switch sides and repeat.

**Keep It Honest:** Keep your hips up; don't let them sag.

**Make It Harder:** Support your upper body with your right hand, instead of your forearm.



## Tackling Hills

Unless you have ambitions of finishing on the podium in your Ultra Challenge, it is advisable to walk the hills during the challenge, and during your longer training runs. Even the top ultra-runners in the world walk some hills and it's nothing to be ashamed of.

Walking the hills will conserve precious energy, allowing you to run stronger on the flats and downhill. It is also a good time to take nutrition and hydration on board.

If you *are* running hills, make sure you ease off the pace, take smaller steps and drive your arms.

## Nutrition

Running an ultra-distance race is nothing more than a moving eating contest! Taking on fuel is vitally important to your success on the day and this is something you will want to carefully think about and even practice.



The aid stations on Ultra Challenges are brilliant, stacked full of everything you could ever need – take advantage of this on the day! You want to be eating a handful of food every 30 minutes, taking on slightly more every time you hit an aid station. A 'handful of food' could be a banana, packet of crisps, small cereal bar, or chocolate bar. Experiment with the foods that work for you when you are on the move (on your training runs).

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I advise taking a short walk every 30 minutes to take on some good fuel, set an alarm if you need to so that you stay on track. When you get to an aid station, eat something there and pop a few items in your bag for on the trail, you can never eat too much.

Make sure you take on some salty foods as part of your nutrition plan. We lose salt when we sweat, and without salt in the body, we are unable to process the water we are taking on. Salty crisps and nuts are ideal fuel.

Taking on liquid is even more important than food. If you become dehydrated, you will really struggle. Make sure you take on some form of drink every 15 minutes on a normal day, more often on a hot day. As a simple guide, you should be trying to drink between 500ml and 1 liter of liquid between each aid station if you can. Consider adding electrolytes to your water, its best to have 2 drinks on you at any one time, one plain water, and one with electrolytes.

### Running at Night

It's likely that you will find yourself running into the night during the challenge. With this in mind, it's worth practicing running on trails at nighttime so you know what to expect.

Run a route that you are familiar with and encourage some friends to join you. Although there is nothing to fear in the woods at night, you are likely to find it nerve wrecking so running as a group will put you at ease.

Here are some tips for running trails at night.

- ✓ Get a good head torch, you will regret buying a cheap one.
- ✓ Concentrate on where you are going and take your time.
- ✓ If you are in a group, warn fellow runners of obstacles such as roots, branches and rocks.
- ✓ Keep your eyes peeled for wildlife. I often see Badgers, Owls, Deer and more on my night runs.



### The Day

#### Be prepared

Make sure you spend the day before the race organising your kit and making sure you have everything in place. The last thing you need are last minute panics. Make sure your



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your race bag is packed and ready and lay your kit out to be absolutely certain that you have everything.

Eat well and get an early night, you need as much rest as you can get before race day. Also give yourself plenty of time to get to the start line in the morning, the last thing you need is some extra running!

Be confident in your training and preparation. Don't worry about what you *haven't* done, focus on what you *have* done. When you get to the start line, don't worry about others. They may look calm, but I can assure you that they are just as nervous as you are on the inside.

You should research and understand what the route looks like, the elevation profile and where the checkpoints are located. You can then prepare yourself for big hills, difficult sections or even easier sections. Running an ultra-route with no idea of the terrain that lies ahead is only going to hinder your progress.

### Race Strategy and Pacing

Based on your training runs, you should have a plan for your race. As previously mentioned, understand where the checkpoints are and any significant sections of the route that may be particularly difficult. Cut the race down into smaller, manageable chunks so it feels less daunting.

Don't go off too fast, it's the classic mistake that runners of all abilities make. Stick to your strategy right from the point you cross the start line. Don't worry about what everyone else is doing, if people sprint off, let them go, don't get sucked into running faster than your ability allows. You should have an idea of the pace you plan to run/walk at from your training. Stick to this plan and stop yourself going faster.

### Have a plan B, C, D...

Often with long races, things don't quite go how we hoped. If this happens, it is easy to be negative and frustrated. To avoid this happening, make sure you have a variety of plans for the day, a best case scenario, and worst case scenario, and some middle ground as well. If Plan A starts to slip, you move onto Plan B...and so on.

Unless you really need a sit down and time to take extra fuel on board, try not to hang around the (fantastic) aid stations for longer than you need. It is very easy to get comfortable and doing so will only make leaving again even harder. Get a plan together for how you hope to manage your needs in the aid stations and stick to it as best you can.

Personally, I like to grab what I need and then start walking while I eat, drink and regain my focus on the task ahead.

### The Days After

The last thing you will feel like doing the day after a 100km run is go for ANOTHER run! However, going for a slow 2-3km run will really support your recovery. Don't want to run? Go for a walk instead, any movement to get the muscles working will considerably increase recovery times.

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### The Weeks After

You've worked really hard to get your Ultra Challenge medal, and you deserve a long rest. Your body will need a long rest after all the training you have been doing. However, try not to stop completely (unless you've decided to never run again!). Doing a few short, slow runs over the weeks post event will allow your body to recover yet stay fit and strong. You've worked hard to get to where you are so it would be a shame to let it all slip away. After a month or so you can start thinking about increasing your training once again, and maybe signing up for your next Ultra Challenge?

### Final thoughts

You are about to embark on an incredible adventure, one that will be tough at times, but hugely rewarding. Enjoy the experience and stay positive, follow the plan and work on getting everything in place and you will have a brilliant experience. Don't underestimate the task ahead, but don't be intimidated by it.

Stay strong, have fun, and go get that medal!







# Find out more

[ultrachallenge.com](http://ultrachallenge.com)

