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Your Training Plan Needs These 4 Types of Long Runs. Here's When to Use Each.

One kind of long run won't cut it in training. An expert breaks down the purpose of each.

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Saba Ahmed

If every long run in your race build looks the same, chances are you're leaving fitness gains on the table.

By adding different types of long runs to your schedule, you not only improve your endurance gains but you also take the pressure off constantly performing well and you keep training fresh. Randy Accetta, director of education for the Road Runners Club of America, originally split long runs into four different categories as a way to give runners permission to run longer and slower—something many runners struggle to do.

But slow miles aren't the only type of long run you need on your plan, and how you accomplish that easy pace can also change. Here's what to know about the long run variations Accetta believes you need on your calendar.

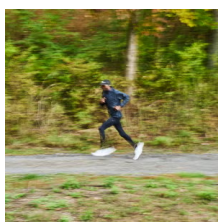
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Long Run With Intent

What it is: A long run with intent means you're tackling a **longer distance** that you haven't reached yet within a given training cycle. You'll likely focus on accomplishing that distance at a steady, **consistent pace**, done at a conversational effort, rather than fitting in speedy miles.

How to execute: This type of long run is most likely done alone, at an easy pace all the way through, and doesn't typically exceed about **three hours**. "You're not stopping to take photos, you're not waiting 10 minutes while someone poops in a restroom. You're not spending a lot of time at the car," says Accetta. You're simply running easy and paying attention to your effort and crossing off all the miles.

Why you want it on your plan: This type of long run is what actually gets you to run farther. It helps you build your **aerobic base**, endurance

engine, and it increases mental discipline.

Long Run With Pace

What it is: The long run with pace mixes easy-effort miles with speedy sections, typically done at marathon pace, half marathon pace, or tempo effort, depending on what you're training for and your goals. This kind of run in marathon training might look like a 10-miler with four miles at tempo, running easy for the first and last three miles and sticking your specific tempo effort in the middle.

How to execute: Similar to long runs with intent, long runs with pace are usually capped at about three hours. These long runs are the hardest efforts out of the four long run categories, but they shouldn't feel like an intense track workout.

Why you want it on your plan: The overall goal of these runs is to mimic race-day stress and performance, rather than simply going the distance. Long runs with pace can help bridge the gap between easy pace and race performance, which can help you reach your goal time.

Social Long Run

What it is: On social long runs, pace and distance don't matter, and you can run as easy as you want. "The goal is not to accomplish race pace or to be super focused. It's to have fun, relax, and enjoy our time with people or with scenery or with yourself," says Accetta.

How to execute: The social long run might last three, four, or five hours, as long as you're continuously running. This is a run you're more likely to go on with friends, though you don't need friends to accomplish it. You might enjoy a nice podcast, run at a slower-than-usual pace, or go a little bit shorter or longer than your given distance if it feels right. In other

words, there are no big goals with this one; it's all about enjoying the experience.

Why you want it on your plan: Social long runs support mental freshness and encourage fun and social connections, which can help prevent [burnout](#). You'll also rack up more time on feet with less physiological stress. They're useful for when you want to get your long run in but need a mental break from focusing on training metrics like pace and distance.

Journey Long Run

What it is: Unlike the social long run, where you're less likely to stop running, the journey long run includes [walk breaks](#) and pauses, like bathroom breaks, stopping to take photos and sightsee, or even grab a snack, which makes this the perfect run for [traveling](#) to a new place.

How to execute: A journey long run doesn't require as much effort as a long run with pace or long run with intent. You can take as many breaks as you'd like because the purpose is to spend [time on feet](#) without worrying about hitting pace or managing specific break times, says Accetta. Because of this, journey long runs typically last four to five hours or more, depending on how many miles you want to run and how often you stop to enjoy the journey.

Why you want it on your plan: [Marathoners](#) and ultramarathoners may benefit most from the journey long run, because the goal is to enjoy spending lots of time on your feet. It's especially helpful for marathoners who may take [four or more hours to finish](#), says Accetta, as it can help you prepare for the physical stress of the 26.2-mile journey.

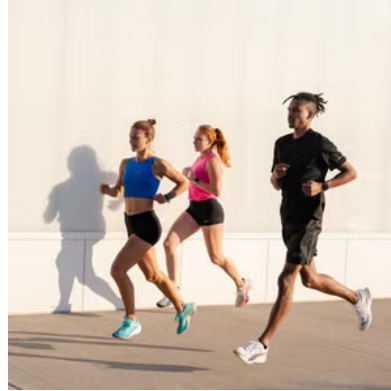
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Kristine Kearns, a writer and avid runner, joined *Runner's World* and *Bicycling* in July 2024. She previously coached high school girls cross country and currently competes in seasonal races, with more than six years of distance training and an affinity for weightlifting. You can find her wearing purple, baking cupcakes, and visiting her local farmers...

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