

How To Achieve a Personal Best

Tips for improving your sports performance

To take your training and competition to the next level you need to do more than just put in time, you need to have a plan. Your training program requires constant adjustment throughout the year to avoid plateaus and burnout. To set yourself up for success, it's helpful to understand some [basic conditioning principles](#). The following tips help you apply those principles to your training.

Fundamentals

If you haven't yet mastered the fundamentals of your sport, this is where you need to focus your efforts. This includes things such as base mileage and skills training. You must play and practice to develop your core skills, endurance and strength.

Proper Nutrition

You need to eat healthy, nutritious food that will fuel your sport and avoid sabotaging your training with unhealthy food and drink choices.

- Complex carbohydrates are the primary fuel for intense muscular effort, and should be the foundation of your nutrition plan.

Interval Work

Steady pace training is good for building a foundation and mileage, but to boost your performance level you need high intensity efforts (several 90-second high effort intervals with a two-minute rest between) once a week. Don't over do it - high intensity training should be less than a tenth of your weekly total time or distance.

Strength Training

Building strength can provide the extra boost of power and endurance you need to set a new personal best. Strength exercises three times a week are enough to build power and mass, and don't need to take lots of time. A well-planned routine of as little as five exercises can be all you need. Read more about [strength training for sport](#). If you have a limited amount of time you can focus on the [5 most effective strength exercises](#).

Stretching

Stretching exercises have also been linked to improved performance in some sports. One study demonstrated a 5% increase in power by increasing hamstring flexibility. The added flexibility appears to lead to better utilization of the quad muscles. So remember to include some basic stretching in your program. More about [Flexibility Exercises](#).

Hydration

Adequate fluid intake is an extremely important aspect of optimal performance. Research shows that losing as little as two to four percent of your body weight in water can lead to decreases in maximum speed and endurance. Adequate fluid intake means you need to drink about a cup of fluid every 15 minutes or so during exercise. Cold water

is absorbed more easily and can help to keep your body temperature a bit lower. More about [Hydration](#).

Rest

Never underestimate the value of rest to an optimal performance. Overtraining is a significant problem in athletes who have hit a training plateau. Watch for [signs of overtraining](#)- listen to your body when it is calling for rest.

Follow the Ten Percent Rule

Increasing the intensity, time or type of activity too quickly is one common reason for sport injury and decreased performance. To prevent this, many fitness experts recommend that both novice and expert athletes follow the ten percent rule, which sets a limit on increases in weekly training. This guideline simply states that you should increase your activity no more than 10 percent per week. That includes distance, intensity, weight lifted and time of exercise. Read more about [The Ten Percent Rule](#)

Keep a Training Log

You should monitor your training as well as your resting heart rate and body weight. Since you may be at risk of over training, you can adjust your schedule if waking resting heart rate is 5 beats above normal for two consecutive days. If your body weight is down significantly from one day to the next you may be dehydrated or lacking muscle glycogen repletion. If this is the case, drink more fluids, eat some complex carbohydrates and train at 60% of your max heart rate max. Or take the day off altogether until your weight returns to normal.

Relaxed Breathing

Work on belly breathing. As you grow fatigued during an event, relax your breath and taking deeper breaths instead of gasping faster. Try [Yoga for Athletes](#) as an addition to your regular training program.

Psychological Factors

[Visualization](#) is a great way to get an edge on the competition. Mental rehearsal for competition has been shown useful in improving performance in tennis, golf and other skill sports. It creates a positive attitude and can strengthen muscle memory so your body is more likely to make the correct movements automatically. Because this is like meditation you need a quiet, calm atmosphere in which to practice. The goal is to imagine in detail every aspect of the performance as it unfolds in a perfect scenario. Think about the sensations and what you feel, see, hear, smell, and taste.