

HOW TO RUN WELL – A basic intro for distance running.

(GN Moorfoot edit of NHS Livewell Guide. Also see Moorfoot Stick Man)

Running is just quickly putting one foot in front of the other, right?

Yes, but running with good technique (or “form”) can make a huge difference. You will use less energy, your muscles won’t tire so much and you will be able to run longer or faster, or both. Good form also reduces your risk of injury. Many good runners could be even better if they were to learn and practise good form instead of just training hard. The earlier you start the better, but **there is a lot to take in. So focus on just one or two things at a time.** Let’s start with posture, then the feet as they land, and work our way up the body.

Lean very slightly forward from the ankles – get a feel for this.....

Stand as tall as you can, feet pointing forwards. Keep your body straight like a long plank and lean forward from your ankles (don’t bend from your hips) until your heels **just** start to come off the ground. Don’t go fully onto your toes or lose your balance. Try to keep this very slight plank-like lean when running.

Good running is light and quiet – listen to your feet as you run

Aim for light, quiet and quick steps. Your feet should not slap loudly or thump heavily. Light steps are more efficient and cause less stress to the body. Imagine yourself floating lightly across the ground, not running down into the ground.

Don’t reach your foot out in front for a long stride

If you reach your foot forward for a long stride and your foot lands ahead of you, it’s like putting the brakes on briefly with each stride. It will slow you down and make your legs more tired. Instead, after your knee has come through, just let your foot come down to land underneath your knee. Your knee should be very slightly bent as your foot lands to help absorb the impact of each stride.

Aim to land mid-foot on every stride, not on your heel or toes

Your foot should be in a flat neutral position as it comes down to land. Try to land flat on the middle of your foot. You get more natural spring in your step this way. It also means your foot is in contact with the ground for less time compared to landing heel first then the foot rolling through on to your toes.

Pick up your back foot a little for your next stride

You need to push off your toes to get going, but once into your running it’s more about your heel up coming up off the ground behind you before that leg swings through again for the next stride. Just as your toes leave the ground, the front upper muscles of that leg are stretched. Like a rubber band stretched then let go, your leg should automatically “ping” through to begin the next stride. Your “ping” will be less effective if your foot comes through low to the ground.

Bring your knee straight through, with a bit of knee lift but not too high

Your knees should come straight through in the same direction you are running. Don't let them come across. Your knees should be moving more forwards than upwards, so don't bring them up too high (unless you are running very fast).

Keep your hips high as you run – feel as if you are semi-suspended

Imagine your hips being high up off the ground as you float across the ground. Don't push your hips forwards, stick your bum out, or "sit" low to the ground.

Keep your upper body fairly still, without "twisting"

Your upper body should stay pretty still as you run with minimal twisting. A twisting action can come from over-striding or too big an arm/shoulder swing.

Keep your arms bent at the elbows, with a gentle, relaxed arm swing

Your arms should stay half-bent at the elbows and your elbows should be slightly out from your sides, just wide enough to fit something like a tennis ball in the gap. As your arms gently swing with each stride, try and take your elbows backwards, not out wide. Don't let your arm straighten or unfold as it moves backwards. Your elbow should always be further back than your hand. As you take your elbow back, your hand should end up by your side (unless flat-out sprinting). When your arm comes forward, your hand should come up no higher than mid-chest and your elbow should end up in line with your side. Your hands can come a little bit across your body but should definitely not cross the centre of your body. Imagine wearing a zipped top. Your hands should not cross the zip. Check your arm action standing in front of a mirror from the front and from each side. Practise regularly until it feels smooth, relaxed and natural.

Keep your shoulders relaxed, low and stable

Try not to let your shoulders rotate (or "rock 'n' roll") with each stride. Keep them stable. Don't let them get tense and come up. Keep them low and relaxed.

Keep your hands relaxed

Your hands should be relaxed, but don't let them flap loose at the wrist. Imagine you are keeping a butterfly within your softly closed hand. No clenched fists!

Keep your head still and in a neutral position

Look straight ahead, about 5-10 metres in front of you. You need to glance down for trip hazards but avoid always looking down at your feet, looking around or nodding. Keep your head up and as still as possible.

And finally, remember to breathe! In and out, through your mouth

Don't strain, hold your breath, or inhale or exhale more than your body tells you. Breathe with a strong regular rhythm in synch with your stride pattern.