Gazelle Sports

Chris' Running Tips

Running Form
Everyone's form is different. Even among the elite, world class runners, you will see many different running styles. Some run low to the ground with little knee lift while others run powerfully with high knee lift and a strong kick. The great American sprinter, Michael Johnson, runs with style that many criticized as inefficient. Today, his very upright style of running is the most often copied running form.

Despite the large variety in running forms, there are a number of elements that are common to most successful running styles. Each of these elements can be practiced and adjusted. Good running form is not something a runner is born with. It is a learned skill. I have been running for more than 30 years and I am still continually making small adjustments to my form.

Posture
The most efficient posture is one that is upright and relaxed. Do not lean forward or backward. Your chest should be out and your shoulders back. If you lean too far forward, a braking action with each step will be the result. You will also put excessive stress on your knees, hips, and back. A visualization that may help is to imagine a line perpendicular to the ground, passing through your ear and straight down through your hips.

Keep your hips pressed forward and your butt tucked in. Visualize standing face first against a wall. Press your hips forward so that the bones of your hip touch the wall. Running with your hips forward will help your knee lift higher, with less effort.

Another common error is balled "sitting in the bucket." This is especially common among beginning runners. This style is caused by the hip and butt being pushed back, into a slight sitting position. This causes your feet to be in front of your body with a very weak push off behind your body. Keeping your hips pressed forward will eliminate this form fault.

Keep your body as relaxed as possible. Tense muscles will slow you down and force you to work harder. Concentrate on keeping your shoulders, jaw, torso, and legs nice and loose.

Stride Length
The most common form I have observed in runners I have coached is over striding. Forcing a long stride will not improve speed or running efficiency. Just the opposite happens. Over striding will result in reaching out in front of your body with your foot and landing heavily on your heel. This will cause a braking action with each step.

Arm Swing
The main purpose of an arm swing is to provide balance and coordination with the legs. The arms should hang loose and relaxed, close to the body. Avoid excessive movement. You want to avoid any tenseness in the shoulders. Your wrists should be loose and floppy. Do not clench your fists. Your hands should be held in a relaxed manner. You may try imagining that you are holding a butterfly in your fingers. Do not crush the butterfly. Any tightness in your hands will transfer all the way up your arm.

During the arm swing, you hands should not travel above your chest or behind the midline of your body. Try to avoid crossing your hand in front of your body. All motion should be forward.

Foot Plant
When your foot strikes the ground it will land either toes first, ball of the foot first or heel first. So which landing is best? Most runners have a foot plant that comes natural. The most natural and efficient styles is ball of the foot first. The heel of the foot contacts the ground a split second later. Landing heel first causes more impact and can be the cause of some injuries. A heel first foot plant also means you are over striding. Your foot should be touching down almost directly under your center of gravity which is under your hip. If you are reaching out in front of your body, you will land heel first and will be putting on the brakes with each step. If you naturally land heel first, it may not be a good idea to try to change your foot plant. Trying to change the mechanics of the foot can be the cause of injury. Landing toes first is not an efficient style for distance running. Toe first landings result in a lot of up and down motion and put a lot of stress on the calf muscles. Toe running is more appropriate for sprinting than for distance running.