

Have a question
about health, fitness
or wellness?
Send it to
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can be difficult to stay motivated. To keep your brain interested, divide your run into several segments and plan a specific focus for each portion ahead of time.

For example, here's a plan for an 18-mile run. Use the first three miles as a warm-up. Make sure each body part, from your head to your toes, is relaxed and getting into an easy, fluid groove.

Make the next six miles the second segment of your run and chose a new focus, like your leg turnover. Spend some time in this six-mile segment counting the number of times your foot hits the ground and work toward 90 strides per minute, the rate many coaches recommend. Try to get into a rhythm and to settle into a comfortable and sustainable cadence by the time you complete this segment.


Alternate your focus on the next six-mile segment. For example, mile one, focus on your breathing. Keep it deep, easy and smooth. Mile two, concentrate on relaxing your upper body. Be aware of hunching or tightening in your shoulders or neck. Mile three, pay attention to your core and overall body position. Repeat this breakdown of focus to finish this six-mile segment.

Take the last three miles to cool down. Go from head to toe to see how your body is feeling. And spend some time during those miles celebrating how far you've come and what you've accomplished.

If all else fails, get creative during your long run and give yourself an imaginary task, such as decorating a house or planning a dream event. Some runners do work in their heads, from writing memos to practicing presentations. You may be amazed what new solutions occur to you while you're pounding the pavement.

I get so nervous the night before a race I can't sleep. What can I do to relax?

Try this breathing exercise in bed the night before the big event: Lie on your back with both arms at your sides and begin a series of "circle breaths," deep, full breaths that start with an inhale through your nose, reach down through your abdomen, rise up through your chest, and finish with an exhale through your mouth. With each breath, picture a circle being drawn through your body. Breathe in for two seconds, hold for two seconds and breathe out for two seconds. Repeat this exercise for at least 10 full breaths.

Once you settle into a relaxed state, start to imagine your race. See yourself at the starting line, feeling relaxed and prepared. Then imagine yourself completing each mile. Try to create as many details as possible, and incorporate as many senses—sight, sound, touch—into your imagery. Most importantly, visualize crossing the finish line feeling strong and confident. Research shows a positive outlook can make a significant impact on your race results. Before you know it you'll be relaxed and ready to fall asleep. 

Paige Dunn is a sport psychology consultant who counsels and educates athletes on the mental component of the athletic experience through her private practice, Xcel Sports. She specializes in working with endurance athletes of all levels and abilities. For more info, visit xcelssportsgroup.com.