

How far should I run?

How much can you add to your distance without getting injured?

Suppose you manage 10km per week now. How many kilometres would you be able to handle next week? And the weeks after that? And how is that for somebody doing twenty km's per week? And for somebody doing thirty?

We will try to answer those questions with the following topics:

- The 10% Rule;
- How to increase your distance safely;
- Rules to increasing distance safely; and
- An example to increasing distance safely.

The 10% Rule

You must have heard about it. The 10 percent Rule says that you can increase your distance safely with 10 percent per week. So if you are doing 20km this week, then next week you can do 22km. The week after 24km etc.

The nice thing about the 10 percent rule is that it is easy – easy to understand and easy to remember. But it is too general.

Imagine you are an athlete who can manage 100km per week. Then would you be able to do 110km the next week? And 120 the next? I doubt it. Those are big increases even for somebody doing 100km per week.

Suppose you are at the other end of the spectrum and you are doing 10km per week now. Then the 10 percent rule says you can safely increase to 11km the next week and to 12km the week after. You would go over 20km per week after eight weeks of continuously increasing your distance with 10 percent. Good chance this would be safe for you. But also a good chance that you'd be selling yourself short. You could probably get to 20km per week a bit faster than that.

The 10% rule is too general for all runners. It is a pretty good rule for runners doing about 20 to 35km per week at best. Still too general though.

How to increase your distance safely

The only right answer to this question is: **listen to your body and let your body decide on what you can handle.**

Unfortunately our stubbornness sometimes makes us neglect our body signals. That's when we fall victim to nasty injuries. But the best way to increasing your distance safely is see how the extra mileage affects your body.

No reaction? Then continue to add on distance. But when you do get a reaction such as prolonged muscle pains, severe fatigue, joint pains or increased resting heart rate then don't be stubborn, and take a rest!

Rules to increasing distance safely

Vague stuff like "Listen to your body" is not what you want to hear. You want clear-cut answers. Well, sorry, there are not many clear-cut answers. Not in life. Not in running. There are some rules of thumb to increasing distance. This might help you in setting up your own running program.

- *Increase the length of half of your runs*
Do not increase the length of all your runs at once. Instead increase the length of about half of your runs. When you do four workouts per week, increase the length of only two of your runs. When you run three times a week, increase the length of every second run.
- *Increase with only one kilometre at a time*
Be cautious with adding too many kilometres to one workout at once. You can make fantastic progress by only adding 1km at most to a workout.
- *Apply the hard/easy principle*
Do a long run once, then next time do a shorter run. Make your body work to make progress. But let your body recover as well!
- *Make every fourth week a rest week*
Every fourth week cut back your distance to about 75 percent of what it was the previous week. This gives your body a chance to recover. Going back to 75 percent suddenly seems so easy after a tough week. This way you build up your resources again and you get ready for the next few tough weeks. Build in rest weeks. You need them.
Warning: Resting every fourth week might not be enough for you after a tough week. If you notice that you are fatigued, then try to make every third week a rest week. See what works best for you.
- *Listen to your body!* Sorry, just wanted to say it once more.

Example of increasing distance

Suppose you are doing four 3km runs a week now. 12km a week is a decent enough amount. But you have bigger plans and want to increase your distance to 25km per week. What could your training schedule look like for the next weeks? We assume that you keep on doing four workouts every week. There is not one solution to this question.

Using the guidelines I just gave you, a training plan could look as follows...

Week	Workout 1	Workout 2	Workout 3	Workout 4	Total
1	3	3	3	3	12km
2	3	4	3	4	14km
3	3	5	3	5	16km
4	3	3	3	3	12km (Rest week)
5	3	5	4	6	18km Increase 1 short run

Week	Workout 1	Workout 2	Workout 3	Workout 4	Total
6	4	5	4	7	20km Increase 1 short run and 1 long run
7	4	6	4	8	22km
8	3	4	3	5	15km (Rest week)
9	4	6	5	9	24km
10	4	6	5	10	25km

Note for Week 6: Keep in mind that your longest run can be in somewhat lower intensity than the other runs. You are trying to cover distance here, not trying to get there as fast as possible.

Would you be able to increase your distance like that?

We really don't know. Maybe you need to build up a bit slower. Maybe you need to have a rest week every third week or maybe even every second week. Maybe you can only get to 20km now and in a few months time you can add on extra distance. It all depends – on your legs, your body, your mind.

Whatever you do, keep in mind: listen to your body! OK, that's the last time to say that...