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## Introducing: Interval Training



In our four-part training series, we'll be introducing some of the training methods you can use to help you improve your running and your parkrun PB, whilst showing how a couple of tweaks to your mid-week training can help you become a more confident runner, whatever your aspirations!

**In this instalment, we're discussing Interval Training.**

To help us to do so, we've enlisted the help of **Dave Newport!** Dave Newport is a coach for Cheltenham Harriers and is the British Triathlon Federation Elite Team Manager for Duathlon

and long-distance triathlon, with over 30 years coaching experience.

He has worked with a number of elite runners, duathletes and triathletes such as Chrissie Wellington, Emma Pooley, Graham Rush and Richard Allen.

### **What is interval training?**

Interval training involves running intervals of fast short periods of effort alternated with slower recovery periods.

Interval training is widely considered to be one of the most effective methods of boosting running performance. It helps you build fitness and improve your ability to sustain running at your target pace, which will ultimately enable you to run faster over your chosen distance.

You don't need to be an experienced runner or be running any particular 5k time in order to benefit from interval training.



### **What are the benefits of interval training?**

The beauty of interval training is that you can run for a longer total duration at your target

pace during an interval session than you could do in a single effort.

By that I mean, if you typically run your 5k parkrun in 30 minutes non-stop and finish with nothing left in the tank, your pace would be 6:00/km (minutes per kilometre).

But, during an interval session, you can breakdown the distance into smaller chunks of shorter, repeated efforts, with a short recovery in between.

For example, you could run 6 x 1k with rest periods in between, and by doing this you will find you will often be capable of running 6k in total at 6:00/km pace instead.



### **How should you include it in your training?**

There are various types of interval sessions, but generally speaking, you have two main areas:

1. **A higher number of shorter intervals at higher intensity eg 10-16 x 70 seconds**
2. **A lower number of longer intervals at slightly lower intensity eg 3-4 x 2k**

When you first start out interval training, it can be confusing knowing where to start. A really good rule is to work to a recovery ratio of 1:2, so if you run fast for 2 minutes, take 4 minutes rest recovery.

You don't need to start with the biggest, most intense workout that you can manage. It's far better to finish a workout with a little room for improvement than to hit a ceiling every time you try to run a fast workout.

When planning your week, always allow adequate recovery time between your hard days. Many runners will find that they can only manage one hard run per week at first. This could mean that if you're planning to run your interval session during the week, you may need to plan for a slightly easier parkrun effort at the weekend.

As you develop, don't take unnecessary risks, by running too hard, too often. You must try to recover fully after each hard run. Give your body the recovery it deserves, before you go hard again.



### **How hard and fast should I run during an interval session?**

There is a common misconception that interval training needs to be flat-out sprints run at the highest possible intensity. However, this is not true and you will benefit more by running with good control, at a pace that is sustainable and comfortable enough to make it repeatable, after a short recovery period.

The easiest way to fail an interval session is to try to run too fast, for too long, without adequate recovery. If you do this, you are not likely to make it to the end of the session. But if this does happen to you – don't panic!

Training always involves a little trial and error, and even the most experienced runners get this wrong sometimes by getting a bit overexcited. Whenever this happens, you will learn from it and the lesson learned will help you plan successfully for future sessions.

All of the variables involved in your workout, need to be decided in line with your current level of fitness and your level of training experience. The best advice that I can give anybody attempting their first interval sessions, is to run each effort slightly slower than your desired target pace, over a distance or duration that is shorter than you think you can handle, and with more recovery than you think you actually need.

It is always more beneficial to finish an interval session happy and in one piece, rather than having overdone the speed and had to stop and risked injury.



### **Example interval training sessions for parkrun:**

A typical high-intensity interval speed session for someone hoping to run a faster parkrun would be 6-8 x 800m. The session would look like:

- 10 minutes jogging warm-up
- 6 x 15 seconds at slightly faster than your parkrun pace
- 5 minutes walking, jogging or rest
- 6-8 x 800m at your target 5k pace, with 200m jogging or walking recovery in between
- 3 minutes rest
- 6 x 15secs at slightly faster than 5k pace
- 10 minutes jogging cool-down

A typical more endurance-based interval session for someone hoping to run a faster parkrun would be 3 x 10 minutes. The session would look like:

- 10 minutes jogging warm-up
- 6 x 15 seconds at slightly faster than your parkrun pace
- 5 minutes walking, jogging or rest
- 3 x 10 minutes at tempo pace (15-20 seconds per kilometre slower than your parkrun pace) with 2 minutes jogging or walking recovery in between
- 10 minutes jogging cool-down

### **Dave's tips**

You should always warm up well before attempting any hard efforts. I like my runners to do at least 10 minutes of easy running before attempting their session.

During the session, a common mistake is to jog the recovery efforts too quickly, when your body is telling you that you need to walk in order to complete the next effort. Never be afraid to walk during the recovery between your faster efforts. Even world-class distance runners will walk their recovery sometimes.

Finally, never skip the cool-down afterwards as this is vital to help start your recovery process. I know that you are likely to be tired after the session, or possibly pushed for time, but I would rather runners reduce the number of efforts slightly in the session than skip the cool-down jog.

Consistency is the key to improvement, so plan ahead. Try to plan for successful sessions that will test you, not break you. The more weeks of good training that you can string together in a row, the better chance you have of seeing your 5k times come down.

Be patient. Whilst you may notice some improvement straight away, the first physical benefits will be noticed after 6-10 weeks.

**[You can view the rest of the training blogs in this series here.](#)**

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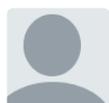
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