

5 Tips to Sprint Faster

1. Run Fast on a Regular Basis

Many parents wonder why their child isn't getting any faster. They send their child off to soccer practice several times per week, and watch them play in games week after week, but don't see significant differences in their speed over time. The simple truth is that children need to run at top speed on a regular basis. This does not happen at sport skills training sessions, where kids are inundated with drills and general conditioning. The drills are performed with a ball or other equipment and can impede the athletes from running at maximum effort and velocity. Conditioning and general fitness work typically emphasizes endurance aspects of training, and not speed related activities. Actual games such as soccer, basketball and football do not even involve maximum velocity efforts, as shown by studies. Hence, athletes do not experience the positive speed stress and adaptation required for faster running. Specific training sessions must be implemented to allow kids to run at or very near top speed, with appropriate recoveries between runs.

2. Provide Good Instruction on Sprinting Technique

Obviously, running fast is a necessity for improving your speed. If there is only one thing you do to make your kids faster, it should be to allow them to run fast. However, if you can provide your kids with simple, foundational technique for sprinting, they will be much better off in the long run. Running fast and efficiently is a complex motor learning challenge for most people. At the highest level of competition, the Olympic 100m final, sprinting looks effortless. Turning on the right muscles and turning off the unwanted muscles at the highest velocity of movement is a skill that must be taught, refined and maintained by a credible coach. Kids must be taught the proper limb movements, body posture and level of effort to maximize their speed potential. If they are simply instructed to "push hard" or "go as fast as you can," they will most likely run into trouble at some point in their development and develop poor habits that will be very difficult to break later on in their athletic career. Seek out a qualified, proven sprint coach to help out your children.

3. Avoid Unnecessary Endurance Running

Many coaches associate good training with long bouts of aerobic exercise. If the kids are breathing hard, sweating and even on the verge of vomiting, they believe that they have appropriately improved their conditioning. These types of workouts, however, do nothing to improve the speed abilities of athletes. Not only are the wrong muscle fibers being worked, excessive endurance work will result in poor posture, inefficient biomechanics and low motivation to continue training. Any chance for transitional muscle fibers to move into the fast-twitch category will be dashed by long-distance running workouts. And, even if your child wants

to become a marathon, triathlon or Tour de France star, doing speed work at a younger age will only help develop speed qualities that will help them later on in their careers. Remember, the top marathoners in the world can run under five minutes per mile numerous times during a race. Over 99% of the adult population are not fast enough to run even one 5-minute mile. General conditioning is fine, but do not allow it to become excessive. Spend more time building skill and motor coordination with young athletes.

4. Introduce Basic Strength Training Protocols

Young athletes can improve their speed abilities by improving their overall strength. One of the big myths of athlete development is that lifting weights can be harmful to the health and development of young kids. While dropping a weight on your foot can be quite harmful, performing weightlifting exercises with low to moderate loads can be useful in developing general strength and improving movement mechanics. Some kids have problems initiating movement because they do not have the strength to move their own body weight quickly. This is exacerbated when kids go through a growth spurt and their limbs have lengthened, but muscular strength has not improved to handle the new lever lengths. Movements such as squatting and lunging, as well as Olympic weightlifting movements can build strength and power for accelerating.

5. Emphasize Relaxation, Ease of Effort and Patience

Running is a complex activity that requires good control and muscular relaxation to be performed effectively. When teaching young athletes proper running mechanics, the initial phase of training must include only sub-maximal efforts to ensure that optimal technique is maintained throughout the workout. Working at a perceived level of effort of 80-85% is optimal for mastering sprinting mechanics. Such effort may translate into 90-95% of top velocity, which is fast enough to effect a positive speed adaptation in the body. Sprinting is a “feel” sport, which means you need to get a feel for proper technique at higher velocities and work on maintaining this feeling. Young athletes that spend a good deal of time perfecting these qualities will benefit from this investment over the long run.