

Is this pace a recovery run? Am I running too fast?

Sally Kipyego, an Olympic silver medalist in the 10,000 metres and third finisher at the 2020 Olympic Marathon Trials, can hold a sub-5:00 minute pace in the 10K. Achieving that requires Kipyego log plenty of hard track sessions and tempo runs. Yet on her non-workout days, she ambles along at 8:30-per-mile pace—sometimes even slower.

Easy runs, also called recovery runs, are all the other miles—not the tempos or track repeats or long runs. They're the entries in your training log that make up a large percentage of your weekly mileage total, but with which you don't bother to record much data: Simply an "8" or a "6" or a "park loop" suffice to remind you what you did that day.

Why do we do them? Because easy running—even very slow easy running—provides fundamental adaptations.

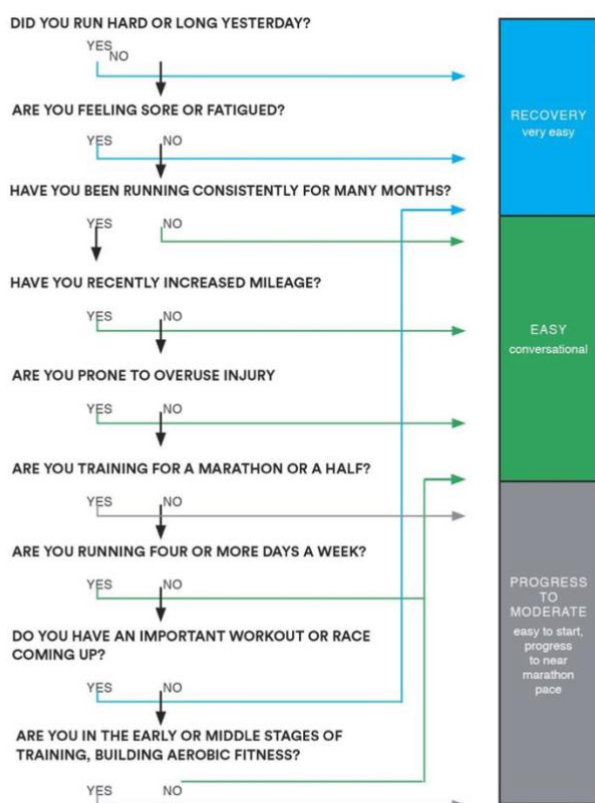
On recovery run days, you're mostly using slow-twitch muscle fibres. They have a higher density of mitochondria, high levels of aerobic enzymes, and greater capillary density than fast-twitch fibres, which are more involved in higher-intensity training. On easy days, you increase mitochondria and capillaries and blood flow to those muscles, so they're better able to utilize oxygen.

All runners, and especially beginners and those coming back from injury, benefit from the cardiovascular and muscular-structural development easy running promotes. The base fitness a runner puts down through a preponderance of easy runs enables the athlete to safely progress to other types of training.

It's during recovery that adaptations from the hard training take place. If a runner doesn't recover, the body is not going to adapt, and you'll either continue digging a hole for yourself or get injured.

EASY-DAY PACE PLANNER

What pace should you run on easy days? Sometimes as slowly you can. Other times you can push the pace – a bit. This flowchart will guide you



The question, then, is what pace is right, and what do you stand to lose if you go too fast or too slow? In a general sense, an easy run is a low-intensity effort of a short to moderate duration. So a long run, even completed at a relaxed pace, should not be considered “easy,” because, despite the pace, there comes a point where the duration raises the overall intensity out of the comfort zone.

Pace is the most important thing to keep easy on an easy day. Many runners can still recover if they run a few more miles, as long as it’s still at an easy pace. But they can’t recover if they run a faster pace, even with fewer miles. So pace really needs to be governed on easy days, but mileage not quite as much.

LEVELS OF EASY

You can calculate your easy-day target pace using a range of methods, from a percentage of current 10K ability to something a little less scientific – perceived exertion – as defined by Roy Benson, exercise physiologist and distance-running coach. We calculate the range for a runner who can do a 50:00 10K (8:03 min/mile pace) or a 3:50 marathoner (8:46 min/mile pace).

RUN TYPE	PERCENTAGE OF CURRENT 10K RACE PACE	PERCENTAGE OF CURRENT MARATHON PACE	PERCENTAGE OF MAX HEART RATE	PERCEIVED EXERTION	FOR A 50:00 10K/3:50 MARATHON (MIN/MI)
RECOVERY	130-138	119-127	60-70	Very easy; a short, slow run, jogging	10:25-11:05
EASY	122-130	112-119	65-75	Conversational; not fatiguing unless distance is longer than average and/or weather or terrain/course provide challenges	9:50-10:25
PROGRESS TO MODERATE	112-126	102.5-115.5	70-85	Easy to start, with a progression to near marathon pace; easily sustainable and only moderately fatiguing	9:00-10:05