



Key elements to improve your fitness level

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Random training produces random results. You may get faster, you may get slower, or you may make no progress at all. In order to increase your fitness level a few basic and key elements need to be in place. These elements are crucial to your athletic success and should be considered in designing your plan.

Progression

The first element is progression. Your body reacts to a stressor (workout), recovers and adapts to that stressor in the form of increased strength, speed, endurance or power. If you apply the same stress load week after week, you won't progress.

This is intuitive in regards to endurance; you have to increase mileage or duration each week in order to reach your race goal. Strength, power, and speed work require a similar progression. You must add greater stress loads each week and recover, in order to move forward.

If you add too much stress too quickly, or with inadequate recovery, you'll overload your system and degrade your performance rather than increase it. A *gradual* progression in stress load is the next key element.

Gradual increase

In considering weekly increase of total stress load or volume, try not to increase more than 10 percent with a goal of roughly six to eight percent. Weekly volume includes intensity and duration. It's also important to note that an increase in intensity will require greater recovery time even if duration stays the same.

As intensity comes up, volume should come down. This progression may seem slow, but even a one percent increase in fitness per week is enormous progress throughout the season.

Quantify your training

Lastly, quantify your training and progress. If your goal is simply to complete a race, you should only be concerned with endurance. A steady increase in duration or mileage will get you to your goal. Strength, speed, or power intervals should be similarly quantified.

Each week gradually increase the number, duration, or intensity of your intervals. A coach can help you determine which workouts and when they are best performed throughout the season. Quantifiable results will motivate. Often athletes are unaware that they are making any progress at all. Make sure you write your plan down so you can see your progression.

Monthly field tests are another way to quantify progress. After a rest day record your average heart rate, speed, and distance over a 30-minute time trial. Try to keep the test conditions as consistent as possible.

Rest and recovery should be quantified as well. Make sure you reduce your volume every fourth week to ensure complete recovery both physically and mentally. Generally, I don't train my athletes hard for more than three days in a row without a rest or recovery day.

