

TRAIL READY

If you've run mostly on the road or treadmill, then you will need to learn how to adapt for the trail ahead. **MR** offers a leg up



Trail running is harder than road running, but it's still running (for those of you who might have missed a meeting). So having endurance, strong lungs, good stride technique and a masochistic attitude, of course, will all do you favours when tackling trails. If you have spent most of your running career pounding the pavement or, heaven forbid, the treadmill, there are specific demands of trail running that your body is just not accustomed to.

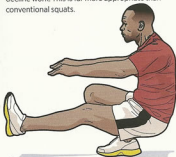
Now, some might say the best way to prepare for trails is to run trails. This is sort of true. However, blessed with some science, we can actually do better than this. Yes, running trails to get used to the feel of it is a key element to trail running success, but you can scientifically condition the body to deal with trails with their uneven terrain, varying gradients, sharp turns and changes of speed using exercises that channel your focus and speed up the process of improvement while reducing the chance of injury quite significantly.

Here are six exercises to supplement your running that will help reduce the chance of injury and enable quicker training times.

THE WORKOUT

1 PISTOL SQUATS

Stand on one leg and lower yourself down and then stand up. For beginners, hold on to a bar for support, and as you get better use your balance, the lower the better. Do three sets of 12 on each leg three times a week. Your quadriceps, glutes and balance will improve dramatically. Strong quads, in particular, are essential for any kind of incline and decline work. This is far more appropriate than conventional squats.



2 SINGLE LEG ANKLE HOPS

Stand on one leg and, keeping the leg straight, hop up and down. Do four sets of 20 reps on each side, two times per week. Try and get as high as you can. This plyometrics exercise increases strength, endurance and power around the ankle joint and calf. Uneven terrain means your stabilizers and prime mover muscles will be put under more strain. The stronger your ankles and calves, the less injured you'll be when trail running.



3 ONE LEG BALANCE ON BOSU

Training your static balance gets your brain better at balancing and concentrating and it strengthens your ankle stabilisers. It's important to progress balance exercises just as you would with weights or cardio. So when it gets easy, close one eye, then if you really want to push yourself, close both eyes and keep as still as you can. These exercises are best done on a time limit, so just play around for five minutes every time you go to the gym this week.



4 FRONT PLANK

As trail running involves linear not just lateral movement and uses more muscle groups at random times, there is more of a need for a stronger core. You should mix up core exercises, as they soon get easy if you can do this one for two minutes with good form, ie staying still, then you need to progress. The next step would be to have a limb off the floor, then two limbs. Keep your back flat at all times, put a tennis ball on your lower back and don't let it fall off.



5 SPEED LADDER - ZIG ZAGS

Speed ladders are standard pieces of kit for strength and conditioning coaches. There are many drills which tend to have an emphasis on foot speed, agility and reactions - exactly what you need when trying to avoid roots, stones and deep mud.

First, get your hands on a 'speed ladder' online, they don't cost much. Then run in and out of the boxes in diagonal fashion as quickly as you can and don't touch the sides. Keep on your toes/balls of your feet. Do these daily at the end of a workout.



6 SPLIT SQUAT JUMPS

Sprinters do these regularly as it helps develop power. It also develops dynamic stability and muscular endurance in the quadriceps, core, trunk and ankles. Start in a lunge position, left foot forward, jump up and land with right foot forward in lunge position. Then repeat. Always maintain an upright body position. Do five sets of 20 jumps three times per week.

