

## June Vacations

A weeklong summer's stay in mid-June on an Atlantic island revealed a middle-aged man carrying a small bowling ball well on its way to becoming a beach ball. Surprised by the self-image, he hopped onto a scale, seeing a weight he had never before known. At least not for himself. In his mind, he was becoming fat.

An easy run is a low-intensity short to moderate running effort. Easy means easy. Not sneaky fast. Not pick it up to a tempo pace as you go. Run at 65-70 percent of your maximum heart rate. That's your heart rate, not your friend's heart rate. Or, run at two minutes a mile slower than your 10kilometer pace, assuming you've run a 10km race. Or trot like a ballplayer does when they hit a home run. It's a pace just fast enough to be faster than a jog but slower than a run with oomph. There is no oomph.

He began portion control at meal time; his plate did not need to be filled to the rim. He removed beer and wine consumption until his weight dropped precipitously. He slept more, allowing his body to work its magic and his mind to rest. He walked away from his current employment, opening his own shop. He ran. He ran a lot. He ran a lot slowly. He ran a lot slowly every day. Because a hot June turned into a hotter July and then into a scalding August, he ran a lot slowly every day on a treadmill.

Easy runs build the base fitness, enabling the progression from simple runs to paced runs leading to better racing. Easy runs maintain the fitness being built from the paced runs, the long runs, the tempo runs, the workouts, and the hill work. The easier the run is between the harder efforts, the more efficient in form and ability becomes the runner. It's the apple a day for runners.

His post-vacation treadmill running came about because he came home with a summer cold. Outside, the oversaturated air was too hot to breathe through just his mouth. Slowly climbing the stairs to the second floor bonus room, opening the shutters to let in the day's light, he weighed his options. On the treadmill, he could control his pace, turning it off when he'd had enough. Stepping onto the treadmill after pushing to plug into the wall outlet that first morning, he truly did not want to run at all. He bargained with himself.

"Run slowly, one mile," he determined, talking himself into the attempt. So, he ran one mile slowly for him, at 15:00 per mile pace. He knew that most "experts" considered that to be walking pace. He knew that per mile pace as a 5:33 marathon pace. He knew that because he had run that pace in a point to point marathon, having become ill in the first couple of miles, the ill feeling worsening by mile 10, with him doggedly trying to finish with whatever self-respect he had remaining in him.

His first mile led into his second, which led into a solid hour on the treadmill. That first day led into a second, equally as easy as the first, only a mile longer. The third straight day was much the same, with another mile added. The six running days that first week, all on the treadmill, and all at the easiest pace he could manage, led to a second week, which led to a third. Running is running.

Easy runs are the runs we do between track workouts, tempo runs, long runs, short and quick runs, hill workouts, staged runs, races, and off days. The rule of thumb is that those easy runs should make up 80-percent of your weekly or monthly running. The easy runs are the standard runs unique to the neighborhood in which we live, the ease of reaching local parks, bike paths, trails, and the like.

We run easy to increase the density of mitochondria, aerobic enzymes, and capillary density, which leads to the ability to run at higher intensities on those days that are not reserved for easy runs. Increase the blood flow, mitochondria, and capillaries through easy running leads to more efficient use of oxygen, and the sustaining of more intense runs for a longer time period. Easy runs lead progressively to faster runs. Egg, meet chicken.

In the fourth week, in the middle of another easy run, he instinctively punched the speed button, accelerating a whole tenth of a mile in pace to 14:50 per mile. Not until almost a mile later did he realize what he'd done. He punched to speed button again. After a bit more time at the slightly quicker pace, he punched again. He continued punching until it was time to stop the day's run.

Not too long after, the next day, he ran with a couple of quick-running friends. He hung onto their pace. He felt smooth. He ran more smoothly than he felt. He finished the run alongside his friends. There was no comment concerning his ableness to run with them. There was no waiting for him. They weren't compelled to slow down to catch and reel him in from behind them. The run was a joined effort.

Six weeks following his vacation, his favorite running shorts were placed back into the running shorts drawer. Glancing over to the running shirts, he pulled out his favorite shirt that he'd not utilized in such a long time. It fit, again, falling gently over his shoulders with room between his skin and the cloth as the shirt fell down to below his waist. It oozed comfy.

Easy running for one runner is too slow for another. That's why running is such a solo venture: one runner requires running over two minutes per mile than their marathon pace, another requires just a minute slower than their 10km pace. For each, the goal is the same in progressing with their own running. For either runner, easy running removes the pressure of "must run a certain pace." Runners get to see, smell, taste, and enjoy the flowers. The more the better.

