

A photograph of a runner in motion, wearing a blue athletic shirt and black shorts. The runner is captured from the waist down, with their right leg forward and left leg back, showing muscular detail. They are wearing a black watch with a yellow accent on their left wrist and white running shoes. The background is a bright, cloudy sky.

# *The Runner's Diary*

A DAILY TRAINING LOG

MATT  
FITZGERALD

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## Introduction

**T**he training diary is a runner's tradition that has been around for many decades. It goes at least as far back as Alfred Shrubbs, a legendary English runner born in 1878 who kept detailed notes about his workouts and even published a book on his training methods.

The impulse to keep a training log is a natural one for runners. Running 20, 30, or 40 or more miles per week, month after month, is a significant accomplishment, but it's not like building a house—we can't see and touch our accomplishments as runners. If you're like me, you probably can't even remember most of the runs you've done. Keeping a training diary makes our running achievements more concrete and less ephemeral.

Pride is only one motivation for keeping a training diary, however. There are certainly other good reasons to do so. The simple effort of keeping such a diary increases our mental and emotional investment in the sport in ways that may positively affect our performance. And, of course, the information that we record can be very useful.

The usefulness of keeping a training diary underlies my recommendation that every runner keep one, regardless of how strongly he or she feels the impulse to do so (not all runners feel it equally). So I'm glad that you've picked up this training diary, and you'll soon be glad you did too. There are five specific ways in which it will help you become a better runner and find more satisfaction in your running.

**Training analysis.** A training diary helps you determine how well your training regimen is working. It does so by enabling you to connect cause and effect, where the cause is your workouts and the effect is your changing fitness level. By looking back over the information in your training diary, you can determine whether you need to run more mileage or less, whether you need more speed work or less, and so forth. There is always a way to train more effectively than you are doing today. Keeping a training diary makes it easier to find better ways to train.

**Self-knowledge.** Each runner is unique. Therefore, no two runners can get their best results by training in exactly the same way. One of your most important duties as a runner is to learn about your running self so you can use this self-knowledge to refine your training recipe. Your training diary provides a wealth of information through which to

develop such self-knowledge. For example, in looking back over the past year's entries, it might strike you that your body seemed to respond much more quickly to speed work than it did to endurance training. You might use this knowledge to slightly shift the balance of your future training toward endurance in order to bolster an apparent weakness while maintaining an existing strength.

**Motivation and accountability.** Training can be a real grind. It takes a long time and a lot of hard work to build peak fitness for an important race. It is difficult to consistently maintain a high level of motivation throughout this process, and the price you pay for losing your motivation can be severe. Your training diary can help you avoid motivational dips by reinforcing your investment in your goals. It's a source of accountability because it holds you to the standards you have set for yourself as a runner. When you look back over all the training you have done, you can't help but think, "I can't stop now. Look at how much work I've done already! I owe it to myself to keep my momentum going until the very end."

**Troubleshooting.** Things inevitably go wrong in the training process. You develop injuries, you experience flat weeks, you have bad races, and so forth. Figuring out the cause of each setback will help you reduce the number of future setbacks you experience. Your training diary holds much of the information you need to successfully troubleshoot your setbacks. For example, in looking over your training diary during a period of injury, you might discover that you tend to get injured anytime you increase your weekly running mileage above a certain amount. Armed with this information, you can hold yourself below the danger level in the future and minimize your injuries.

**Confidence building.** Every runner experiences doubts about his or her ability to achieve race goals. The runners who most often achieve their goals are those who muster the confidence to shout down these natural voices of doubt. Your training diary can be a great source of confidence because it is a rich record of how much hard work you've accomplished and how much progress you've made. It is the nearest thing you have to proof that you can achieve your goals before you actually achieve them. Whenever you hear those voices of doubt within you, pick up your training diary and remind yourself of how much cause you have to believe that you will achieve your goals.

Like training itself, keeping a training diary rewards you in direct proportion to your investment in it. To get the most out of this training diary, you must record detailed, accurate information consistently, and you must use it for the five purposes discussed here. You've taken the first step in choosing this training diary. Now take the next!

# [1] How to Use This Training Diary

If you've kept training diaries before, you will find this one to be a little different from those you've used in the past. If this is your first training diary, you probably have a general sense of how to use it but also some questions about which types of information to record and how to record them. In either case, keep reading! You will find the tips you need to get the most out of this tool.

The main body of this training diary consists of preformatted calendar days on which you will write your training (and some nutrition) information. Let's start at the top of each preformatted calendar day and work toward the bottom.

**Date.** This is left blank so that you can start the diary at any time of the year without wasting pages. The diary has a weekly level of organization (with space for weekly summary information at the end of each), so if you start your diary on a Wednesday, for example, be sure to put your first entry on Wednesday of the first week.

**Resting heart rate.** Your resting heart rate provides a good indicator of changes in your fitness level and your current level of fatigue. As you gain fitness, your resting heart rate will gradually decrease. When your body is not well-recovered from recent training, your resting heart rate may rise. The best time to measure your resting heart rate is first thing in the morning.

**Weight.** Many of us weigh ourselves regularly as a way to monitor our health and appearance, but body weight is also a performance-related variable. Your body weight should tend to decrease, if only slightly, as you gain fitness. Getting in the habit of weighing yourself each morning and recording the number will help you stay in touch with this element of your fitness development. Note that your scale weight is affected by your hydration level as well as changes in your actual body mass. So be sure you're adequately hydrated throughout the day.

**Distance.** Note the total distance of your run. I recommend that you train with a speed and distance device such as a Garmin Forerunner so you can easily record accurate distance information for each of your runs.

**Time.** Record the total duration of your workout.

**Pace/split times.** For steady-pace runs, divide the total distance of your run by the total time to determine your average pace for the run. For variable-pace workouts such as interval runs, record your split times for the high-intensity segments (for example, 6 x 400m at 1:49–1:52). Each of your runs should target a particular pace that is appropriate to the specific type of run you're doing and your current fitness level. I recommend that you use my target pace level (TPL) system to determine the right pace for each workout. See Appendix B for an explanation of how to use the TPL system. See Appendix A for a complete menu of running workouts that includes the appropriate pace level(s) to target in each.

**Intensity Factor.** Intensity Factor is an index that quantifies the overall relative intensity of your run. To calculate it, divide your current "functional threshold pace" in seconds per mile by the average pace of your run in seconds per mile. Your functional threshold pace is your estimate of the fastest pace that you could sustain for 1 hour in race conditions today.

For example, suppose your current estimated functional threshold pace is 6:45 per mile, or 405 seconds per mile. Now suppose your average pace (total time divided by total distance) for today's run is 7:55 per mile, or 475 seconds per mile. This means the Intensity Factor of today's run is 0.85.

Why record this number? Because the intensity of your running is as important as the distance. The distance of a run alone doesn't tell you how hard it was, but the distance and intensity combined do. You will get the best results from your training if you vary the intensity of your runs throughout the week. In a typical week, you should have two runs with Intensity Factors above 0.9 (high intensity), two or three runs with Intensity Factors between 0.7 and 0.8 (low intensity), and the rest between 0.8 and 0.9 (moderate intensity).

**Notes.** This is a general space to record any other pertinent information about your training. Note whether your workout was a run or another activity, and if it's a run, the specific type of run. (You'll find a menu of basic workout types in Appendix A.)

Describe the weather, first of all. Air temperature and other factors may have a big impact on your running performance on any given day. Recording basic information about the weather during your workouts will put the numbers in context. For example, a slower-than-usual long run in 85-degree heat is not as worrisome as a slower-than-usual long run on a 55-degree day.

Also write down a few words about the course, noting such details as elevation profiles and other factors that affect performance. Include a brief description, such as "San Pablo Dam Loop" or "Washington High Track." Finally, note the shoes you wore so you can

keep track of the mileage you put on them. Replace your shoes at least every 500 miles to avoid increasing your injury risk.

For workouts other than runs, record the general information that is most germane to that activity. For example, if you bicycle, note the duration and distance. If you lift weights, note the number of exercises and sets. If you work out twice on any given day (for example, a run in the morning and a strength workout in the afternoon), use the notes space to record the basic details of the second workout. See the sample diary on pages 16–19 for an example of what this looks like.

**Aches/pains.** Overuse injuries are the bugbear of the runner's life. The primary cause of most running injuries is doing too much too soon. If you respond quickly to signs that an injury is emerging by temporarily reducing your training and then cautiously resuming your ramp-up, you will avoid most breakdowns. Recording the aches and pains you feel in each run will help you catch incipient injuries early.

**Rating.** Objective workout information is indispensable, but giving each run a general subjective rating is also valuable. Too many "poor" ratings may indicate that you are overtrained, whereas a predominance of "good" and "very good" ratings suggests your training is right on track.

**Nutrition.** As you know, diet is as important as training with respect to running performance. This section gives you a quick and easy way to monitor the overall quality of your diet. Simply record the number of times you eat foods within each category over the course of the day. Don't get too hung up on portion sizes, although if you eat a very large portion of a certain food you can count it twice, and if you eat a very small portion you can count it as one-half of a full portion.

Aim to consume at least three vegetables and three fruits each day and preferably no fried foods and no more than one sweet. The other categories may vary according to your preferences.

**Weekly summary.** Record your total running mileage and total training time (including crosstraining sessions) here as well as a line or two about your progress, performance, challenges, and/or any setbacks experienced during the week.

At the end of each week, record your average Intensity Factor for the week. (Add up your Intensity Factors for all the runs you did that week and divide by the number of runs you did.) This will allow you to compare your training from week to week in terms of intensity and not just running distance.

Take a look at a week of my training on pages 16–19.

**WEEK 24.** A little threshold training goes a long way. A Spanish study involving high-level runners found that those who did one threshold run per week for five months improved significantly more than those who did two a week.

**MONDAY** 6/8/09 RESTING HEART RATE 52 WEIGHT 160

DISTANCE 5 mi. TIME 38:51 PACE/SPLITS 7:46 INTENSITY FACTOR 0.75

**Notes** Recovery run. Ran office loop. 72° F and dry. Wore Nike Frees.  
Strength training 20 min.: dumbbell lunge (2 x 10, 35 lbs.),  
side bridge (2 x 30 sec.), push-up (2 x 20), suitcase deadlift (2 x 10, 35 lbs.),  
lying draw-in w/ hip flexion (12 reps.)

ACHES AND PAINS Right hip flexor sore.

**Rating**  GREAT  VERY GOOD  GOOD  FAIR  POOR  VERY BAD

<b>Nutrition</b>	VEGGIE	FRUIT	GRAIN	MEAT/ FISH	NUT/SEED/ BEAN	WATER	SWEET	FRIED
	4	3	4	1		7	2	1

**TUESDAY** 6/9/09 RESTING HEART RATE 52 WEIGHT 160

DISTANCE 6.25 mi. TIME 42:40 PACE/SPLITS 6:49 INTENSITY FACTOR 0.86

**Notes** Lactate intervals at track, 6 x 800m @ 2:34-2:37 with 400m  
jog recoveries. 69° F and breezy. Wore racing flats.

ACHES AND PAINS Right hip flexor worse.

**Rating**  GREAT  VERY GOOD  GOOD  FAIR  POOR  VERY BAD

<b>Nutrition</b>	VEGGIE	FRUIT	GRAIN	MEAT/ FISH	NUT/SEED/ BEAN	WATER	SWEET	FRIED
	3	4	3	2	1	7	1	1

## About the Author

**Matt Fitzgerald** is the author of 12 published and forthcoming books on fitness, nutrition, and weight loss, including *Runner's World Guide to Cross-Training* (2004), *The Cutting-Edge Runner* (2005), *Performance Nutrition for Runners* (2006), and *Triathlete Magazine's Essential Week-by-Week Training Guide* (2006). His first published work, *Triathlete Magazine's Complete Triathlon Book* (2003), now has 53,000 copies in print.

A prolific health and fitness journalist, Matt currently serves as senior editor of *Triathlete* and contributing editor of *Inside Triathlon*. As a freelancer, he writes regularly for such national publications as *Bicycling*, *Experience Life*, *Her Sports*, *Maxim*, *Men's Fitness*, *Men's Health*, *Outside*, *Runner's World*, *Stuff*, and *Triathlete* and for websites such as Active.com and Runner's World Online.

In addition to his work as a writer, Matt is a featured coach with Training Peaks, the leader in online training services for endurance athletes and coaches. Matt trains 10 to 20 hours per week and lives in San Diego with his wife.

A FULL YEAR  
OF UNDATED  
PLANNING AND  
DIARY PAGES  
WITH WEEKLY  
TIPS

# The Runner's Diary

A DAILY TRAINING LOG

## An essential tool guaranteed to improve your running

Have you fallen into a rut with your training, pounding out the same miles at the same pace day after day? Let Matt Fitzgerald guide you through the process of improving your season and your daily workouts in seven easy steps.

By using his Pace Zone Index, you can enhance the quality and efficiency of your routine. After each run, calculate your Intensity Factor—a simple tool to interpret the data from your training. You'll know when to run harder and when to back off, valuable insight that will help you run farther and improve faster with fewer injuries.

*The Runner's Diary* makes it easy to record every detail: workout type, distance, time, pace/splits, weather, course, even which shoes you wore. There's also space for crosstraining workouts. And daily nutrition is made easy to track with a concise method of noting what you eat.

Every runner craves the satisfaction that comes from finding new levels of fitness and logging distance on trails and roads near and far. *The Runner's Diary* puts all this and more at your fingertips.



Matt Fitzgerald is the author of several books on running, nutrition, and weight loss, including *The*

*Cutting-Edge Runner* and *Brain Training for Runners*. A contributor to *Runner's World* and *Running Times*, he also creates training plans for runners and triathletes as a featured coach with *Training Peaks*. He lives and trains in Northern California.

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