

Form and Function

Form and function is a basic concept in biology. That is, form will determine function. For example, since we walk upright, our form dictates that we would also run upright. We would not run on all fours. Conversely, function affects form. As you run more, your muscles increase in size to manage this task.

Your running form is crucial in your ability to pound out mile after mile as efficiently as possible. Each runner's form is like a signature. It is unique and characteristic to you, but there are general principles that apply to all runners.

Shoulders and arms are easily overlooked since your legs are doing all the work. However, consciously pumping your arms will increase your speed without an extra load on your legs. You should always pump your arms in a front/back motion and not across your chest. Think of pulling yourself along in a forward direction when swinging arms. I think this is one of the easiest mistakes to correct, yet I see it all the time in runners.

Keep shoulders and hands relaxed so that your upper body does not tense. Your elbows should be at a 90 degree angle. Pump your arms from your shoulders, not your elbows. Imagine carrying an egg in each hand and holding them lightly to keep your hands relaxed.

Relax your face. Don't spend precious energy keeping your face tense. Let your cheeks be "bouncy". Relaxing your face will help you relax your entire body. This is when you can run easily with minimal effort.

Look forward, not down if possible. Look out 15-20 feet, which will keep your head and neck in a more upright posture. Unfortunately, this is not possible with trail running; there is no way to avoid head tilt.

Run tall. Keep your upper body upright with a slightly forward lean. Keep shoulders back so that your lungs can expand easily. Once you start hunching over, you will now lose lung capacity and sacrifice precious oxygen flow. All of the muscles of your chest and torso help with respiration. Most of us will start to hunch forward as we tire, letting shoulders droop as well. Maintain your upright form at all times.

Have you noticed that I haven't even spoken of the lower body yet? We all know your legs are the work horses when running, but your upper body can make or break you.

Your stride should be natural and not forced. It can be just as bad to run short, choppy steps as it is to try to stride out too far. Your foot should land on the mid-foot as opposed to the heel. Now roll forward, using your calf muscles to push off. Your feet should not slap loudly as they hit the ground. You should land smoothly and push off with a spring. Proper shoes and foot alignment are necessary for this to happen.

Distance runners don't need much knee lift like sprinters. You want a quick leg turnover with a shorter stride. Elite runners generally average around 180 steps per minute.

As a chiropractor, proper alignment of your body is of the utmost importance. If you are having problems with your form, you may be out of alignment. Chiropractic care is one more tool to keep you going!

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