

RUNNINGWITHUS & WATERAID

GUIDE TO OBSTACLE RACES



RunningwithUs exists to provide the best endurance sports coaching, personal training and fitness consultancy in the UK. Established by GB running coach Nick Anderson and actress Phoebe Thomas we have supported hundreds of runners, triathletes, charities and businesses to achieve their goals. Our team includes London's top personal trainer and young endurance sport coach, Tom Craggs and GB distance runner Lucy MacAlister.

This guide is designed to give you an overview of some of the key elements of training, nutrition and conditioning to help you become the best obstacle racer you can be! Use it in conjunction with the training plans you have also been provided.



BEFORE YOU START...

This guide the the plans that go with it are designed to give and overview of some of the elements we believe to be important when training for an obstacle race, whether it is your first or whether you are a seasoned campaigner.

As with all forms of exercise, but particularly when you are mixing running, strength training and high intensity interval training it is important that you are physically read to take on both the training and the race itself. Ensure you have been cleared for exercise by your GP and explored any previous or current injuries with a good sports physiotherapist or doctor before you undertake any of this training.

THE RUNS



 **WaterAid**

runningwithus 

EASY RUNNING

These should be nice and easy and you should feel relaxed. Enjoy the scenery. You should be breathing easily and be capable of holding a conversation throughout the run. This will mean that you are running in the 60-70% range of your Maximum Heart Rate (MHR). Easy running builds a base of endurance and will help you recover from hard runs and circuit sessions.

THRESHOLD RUNNING

Threshold runs are the 'golden zone' of endurance training. They are run at a controlled brisk pace, about 80–85% of your MHR, you'll only be capable of uttering a 2-3 words. These runs improve your lactate threshold (the speed above which your body struggles to cope with the lactic acid created by burning energy without oxygen), your running efficiency and aerobic capacity.

LONG RUNS

Long runs are vital in your plan. At first, concentrate on increasing the time on your feet rather than worrying about distance. Start off by heading out for at least an hour and run at 65-75% of MHR, building more intensity in as you progress through the weeks. These runs improve your muscular endurance and condition your body to burn fat as its primary fuel source.

INTERVAL RUNNING

Interval running in our plans refers to running harder than threshold effort - pushing to that 9/10+ zone that helps you get fit quickly and builds mental and physical strength and develops your leg speed. Generally you'll see this kind of running in your 'circuits' sessions. Be honest with the effort and work hard.

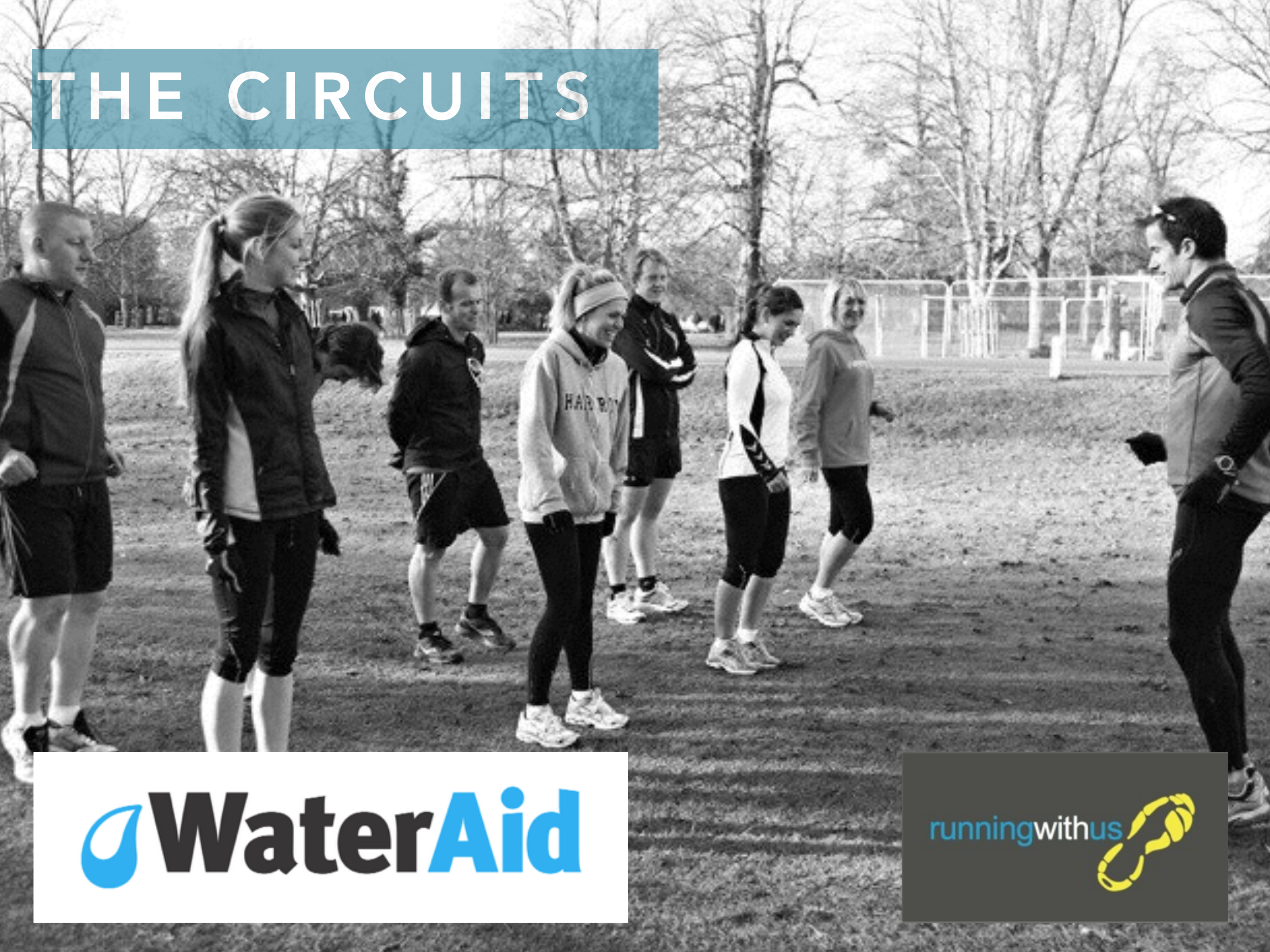
FARTLEK RUNS

Just think about fartlek running as mixed pace running. The Swedish word for 'speed-play'. As the blocks of time reduce, aim to speed up your running! Run longer efforts (5 or 6 minute runs) at a 'threshold' effort, the mid length efforts (3 or 4 minutes) at a 5-10km effort (9/10) and the short (2 or 1 minute efforts) pushing hard.

CONTINUOUS HILLS

Continuous hills build strength. Find a hill with a steady gradient. Run up the hill for 45-60 seconds at a 3-4 word answer effort, turn and also run downhill at 3-4 word answer effort and repeat up and down for the full block of time. You'll run up at a controlled, steady speed, and down quite fast.

THE CIRCUITS



 **WaterAid**

runningwithus 

CIRCUIT SESSIONS

An obstacle race is not just a run with a few extra difficulties thrown in the way. Whilst you need to be 'running fit' if you can't combine your running with being able to move your own bodyweight things are going to get tricky on the day. Circuit training is a good way to prepare for obstacle races as they combine bodyweight exercises with short bursts of high intensity, interval based cardio - replicating the pattern you'll experience on race day. We have suggested some sample circuits sessions below but consider checking out a local class or boot camp or find friends to tackle the work outs below with you - they are generally easier in a group setting!

Be aware that when it comes to strength training we are all individuals - take the time to get yourself checked out by a GP to ensure you are ready to tackle these circuits. We have written 3 different circuits sessions that test your body in different ways. Aim to do a minimum of one circuits session a week.

The exercises are designed for you to complete anywhere with little or no equipment. Doing these sessions in the gym is fine but as you get closer to race date try to tackle some of these outdoors, on grass or trail surfaces. The goal of the sessions is to combine a high heart rate with regularly getting your bodyweight up and down. On the following pages you will find descriptions of the exercises and then the planned workouts themselves.

BEAR CRAWLS

Come down onto all fours with your hands and feet in contact with the ground. Keeping your hips low, back straight and your core engaged at all times take your opposite arms and legs forward and then change to the other side, crawling your way forward. Move at a smooth, steady speed without losing a good posture.

DUCK WALKS

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart. Squat down until your buttocks are at a 90 degree angle to the knee or a little below the knee. Ensure your chest is up, open and that your back is straight. Begin to walk while keeping your buttocks as low as you possibly can. Your arms can be folded in front of you or with your hands on your temples to help keep your back straight. After a few steps you'll feel the burn in your glutes and quads.

CRAB WALKS

Start by sitting on the ground, hands planted just behind your back and legs bent, feet on the floor. Next, raise the hips up slightly so that only your hands and feet are now in contact with the ground. The higher you can raise your hips at this point, the more abdominal benefits you're going to see. Once you're in this position, you then want to "walk" across the floor as fast as you can. If you'd like, try creating an obstacle course to move through, as the extra turning will further work the upper body muscles.

PRESS UPS OR 3/4 PRESS UPS

Place your hands shoulder and a half's width apart, get into the plank position, lower your chest to the floor and push back up, not just pushing through your chest and arms, but also through your core. If you are not ready for a full press up repeat the movement above but with your knees in contact with the ground. Ensure a straight line is formed between the knee, hip and shoulders.

BURPEES OR BURPETTES

Stand with your feet shoulder width. Drop quickly into a squat position with your hands on the ground in front of you. Jump both legs back together so that you are in a press up position before jump both feet back into the squat position and finishing with a small jump with your hands in the air. If you are not ready for a full burpee try a burpette. It's the same as the above but when you reach the press simply jump the legs back into a squat position and stand without the final jump.

DEAD HANGS/MONKEY BARS

Monkey bars can generally be found at your local park or playground, and many gyms also now have them and they may well appear on race day for you! Monkey bars require core strength in your lats, grip and core. If you are not strong enough yet to move through a series of monkey bars then start by doing 'dead hangs' (literally hanging from the bars without moving) or having a partners assist you by supporting your legs as you move along the bars.

SQUATS/JUMP SQUATS

Start with your feet shoulder width apart with your chest up and shoulder back. Gradually push your hips back and down as if you are sitting onto a chair behind you. Keep your weight balance across your feet as you do so. Take your hips down to a 90 degree angle with the knee ensuring your back remains upright and chest open. Then drive your hips back up into the standing position. To make it harder do a 'squat jump' - after you have reach the squat position jump int the air by powerfully driving your hips through and up. Land softly and move smoothly into your next squat.

WALKING LUNGES

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and hands on hips. Step forwards and flex at the knee to drop your hips to create a 90 degree angle at both the front and back knee. Drive back up through the heel of the front foot back into the standing position before repeating the movement with the opposite leg. Your torso should remain upright with the shoulders back at all times.

BRIDGE/SINGLE LEG BRIDGE

From a sit up position, keep your stomach strong, engage your glutes and roll up into a bridge. Keep your hips high by squeezing your glute muscles. To make the bridge harder hold your hips level and high whilst extending one leg for 2 seconds before changing to the other side.

PLANK/PLANK BUILDER

From a prone position raise up through your core on your elbows and toes, keeping a straight line from the neck down through the legs to your ankles, engage all your core muscles by sucking your belly button up to the ceiling. Keep your chest over your elbows. A 'plank builder' is tougher version. Once you are into your plank position continuously raise yourself up and down from an 'elbow' position to a 'straight arm' position without letting your hips sag down.

CIRCUIT 1

10 minute warm up - 6 minutes of easy jogging + 4 x 20 seconds squats, 20 seconds high knees, 20 seconds rest

Main Circuit - move through the following exercises in order;

Fast run - 1 minute

Squat or Squat Jump - 40 seconds

Fast Run - 1 minute

Press up or 3/4 Press up - 40 seconds

Fast Run - 1 Minute

Burpee or Burpettes - 40 seconds

Fast Run - 1 minute

Plank or Plank Builder - 40 seconds

Beginners - Two sets with 5 minutes rest between sets

Intermediate - Three sets with 3-5 minutes rest between sets

Advanced - Four or Five sets with 2 minutes easy jogging between sets

5 minute cool down up - Gentle jogging + stretch

CIRCUIT 2

10 minute warm up - 6 minutes of easy jogging + 4 x 20 seconds squats, 20 seconds high knees, 20 seconds rest

5 minutes running @ threshold effort (2 minutes rest)

Main Circuit - move through the following exercises in order;

2 minute fast run

Duck Walk - 45 seconds

Bear Crawl - 45 seconds

30 second sprint

(90 seconds rest)

2 minute fast run

Monkey Bars or Dead Hangs - 45 seconds

Crab Walk - 45 seconds

30 second sprint

5 minute cool down up - Gentle jogging + stretch

Beginners - Two sets with 3 minutes rest between sets

Intermediate - Three sets with 2 minutes rest between sets

Advanced - Four or Five sets with 90s easy jogging between sets

CIRCUIT 3

10 minute warm up - 6 minutes of easy jogging + 4 x 20 seconds squats, 20 seconds high knees, 20 seconds rest



Main Circuit - move through the following exercises in order;

3 minutes fast running to include obstacles

(90s jogging)

40 seconds for each exercise, 20 seconds rest before moving onto the next exercise;

Squats or squat jump

Plank or plank builder

Burpees or Burpettes

Bridge or Single Leg Bridge

Walking Lunge or Static Lunge

Dead Hangs



5 minute cool down - Gentle jogging + stretch

Beginners - Two sets with 2 minutes rest between sets

Intermediate - Three sets with 90 seconds rest between sets

Advanced - Four sets with 60 seconds easy jogging between sets



THE CORE



 **WaterAid**

runningwithus 

The following pages outline at home, strength and conditioning and stretching exercises to be undertaken when the plan says 'core'

THE FINGER CRUSHER

Get into a sit up position, find the natural arch in your back, place your hands under the arch, engage your lower abs and pelvic floor and push your spine down on to your hands, trying to crush your fingers.

The next level: Do slight alternate leg lifts, while still keeping the pressure on your hands even.

PLANK

From a prone position raise up through your core on your elbows and toes, keeping a straight line from the neck down through the legs to your ankles, engage all your core muscles by sucking your belly button up to the ceiling. Keep your chest over your elbows.

The next level: Add in alternate leg lifts by squeezing your glutes, work to keep your hips level. If this is too hard to begin with, you can avoid lower back pain by doing this with your knees on the ground.



SIDE PLANK

Make a right angle with your supporting arm, your feet together and your stomach strong. Rise up, making sure you squeeze your glutes and push your pelvis through. Hold it for 30-60 seconds.

The next level: Lift your free arm into the air, keep your side really strong, then tuck the arm under your hips and take it back to the top again in a flowing, control movement. Again this plank can be done on your knees to make it easier.



THE BRIDGE

From the sit up position, keep your stomach strong, engage your glutes and roll up into a bridge. Keep your hips high by squeezing your glute muscles. Keep your hips high and level throughout.

The next level: Make this tougher by crossing your arms over your chest or including alternate leg lifts ensuring your hips remain in the same position.



PRESS UP

Press-ups are a key exercise to improve stability and posture on the bike. Place your hands shoulder and a half's width apart, get into the plank position, lower your chest to the floor and push back up, not just pushing through your chest and arms, but also through your core.

The next level: Narrow your hands in a diamond shape under your chest before carrying out the same movement. If this is too hard carry out the same movement on your knees.



SPLIT LEG LUNGE

This works the cycling muscles in a full chain movement. Point your toes forward, keep your back heel lifted and with hands on hips, lunge down, squeezing the glute of your rear leg. Make sure everything goes down in the centre and not forwards. Your knee should NOT be over the front of your toes, lunge forward with a bent back knee.

The next level: Once you've nailed this move, you can progress to driving the knee up from the lunge.



SINGLE LEG SQUAT

This also works everything in a full chain movement. Stand on one leg, engage your glute on your standing leg, squat down as if sitting back onto a chair, keep your hips facing forward and aligned with your knee and toe. You don't want your knee to roll inwards, so go down as far as you can without that happening.

The next level: Focus on gradually increasing the depth of the squat. You can use a Swiss ball between yourself and a wall for balance.



THE STRETCHING

 **WaterAid**

runningwithus 

STRETCH 1 - THE GLUTES

Sit with one leg out straight. Cross the other leg over, keeping knee bent. To feel stretch in backside hug bent knee into chest. Keep back straight. Hold for 30-45 secs.



STRETCH 2 - HAMSTRING (ORIGIN)

Lay on back. Pull one leg up to chest and hug with both arms. Keep one leg straight on floor keeping ankle flexed.



STRETCH 3 - HAMSTRING (BELLY)

Lay on back. Keep one leg on the ground. Raise other leg holding the back of the calf with a bend at the knee. Bring up to feel the stretch in the middle (or belly) of the hamstring. Use a rope or towel around the foot to help if you need to.



STRETCH 4 - HAMSTRING (INSERTION)

Repeat stretch number three but this time with a straight leg. Flex ankle to feel stretch in behind the knee. Use a rope or towel around the foot to help if you need to.

STRETCH 5 - LOWER BACK & IT BAND

Lay on back. Bring one leg up to chest and rotate to lower the knee to floor using opposite arm as a counter weight. Keep one leg straight on floor keeping ankle flexed and keep shoulders on floor. Other arm should be straight out at shoulder level.



STRETCH 6 - QUADS

This can be done lying on your side in a straight line. Grasp the top of the ankle with the same side hand and bring heel to backside. Hips should be pushed forward.



STRETCH 7 - HIP FLEXORS

Kneel on one knee. Take the other leg forward with a large stride. Push hips downwards until a stretch is felt in the front of the hips/quads.



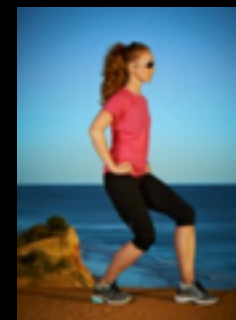
STRETCH 8 - CALF (GASTROCNEMIUS)

Stand with feet shoulders width apart. Take one foot forward and keep feet parallel. Maintain the arch in the forward foot by pressing down with the toes to stop foot rolling in. Straighten back leg and feel stretch in top area of the calf



STRETCH 9 - CALF (SOLEUS)

Repeat position from number eight, but this time bend back leg to take stretch into lower calf above Achilles.



STRETCHING - TIPS

- * Don't forget to stretch both legs and repeat holding stretch for 40-45 seconds each time.
- * Never stretch cold muscles. The main benefit for endurance athletes is stretching after your workout.
- * Instead of stretching pre workout, give yourself time to gently ease into your run or carry out some active, but light strength exercises such as static lunges.
- * A good stretching routine will help to restore the muscle balance and allow you to be more flexible.
- * Do not underestimate the value of cross training, massage and stretching in your schedule.
- * Consider regular sports massage and yoga as well to help you stage on top of a gradual build up in tightness...don't wait until injury occurs!

THE CROSS TRAINING

 **WaterAid**

runningwithus 

WHAT IS CROSS-TRAINING?

There are 2 types of cross-training or X training we all need to know about;

- * One is your conditioning work, which focuses on strengthening muscles but won't make you aerobically fitter. Examples are Pilates, core conditioning, weights and floor work such as the plank or press-ups (see the page on strength and conditioning for more). All these areas should play an important role in your training at least once a week and our plans include both circuits and core elements to cover this.

- * The other is aerobic conditioning such as swimming, running, aqua jogging (yes running in the pool with a buoyancy aid!), rowing and using a cross trainer. This exercises the heart and muscles and will definitely keep you aerobically fit.

Your heart doesn't know the difference between going for a ride, a run or cross training it just works as hard as you ask it to. You can really boost your fitness towards any running distance with clever cross training.

CROSS TRAINING TIPS

Recreate your training plan on the treadmill, cross-trainer, rower or in the pool swimming or Aqua Jogging if you feel exceptionally sore in the lower limbs after hard days.

If you're injured firstly consult a doctor or a physiotherapist. If they say you are able, still follow your training plan but use cross train instead. Don't lose that hard-earned fitness - keep going! If you can see a sports physio or injury expert they will also offer treatment and training advice. Ensure that the cross training is also pain free.

If the plan says 45 minute easy run this can be easily recreated on the kit listed here. So can your threshold runs and interval work. Remember the key is to train to effort, and don't worry about miles or pace.

Try not to 'aimlessly' cross train. Attack your cross training sessions with the same focus and commitment as you would your rides and you'll start to see the value of these sessions. Consider gym classes or outdoor exercise classes but be aware of their relevance to running. The key above all else is aerobic development and muscular endurance. There are loads of great classes out there, olympic lifting for example, which will get you fit...but not necessarily running or obstacle race fit. Pick you classes wisely...and yes...spin classes can be great! Ensure you are still fresh for your main running and circuits sessions though.

Try our core conditioning exercises earlier in this pack once or twice a week for 10 -15 minutes holding and repeating each position several times. These can all be completed at home after a ride and you don't need to belong to a gym or spend hours there!

Certain types of cross training are better suited to certain sessions from your plan. For longer workouts mix up XT for up to 2 hours mixing swimming, running and gym work. Running, aqua-jogging and cross trainer can be great for replicating threshold sessions and the rower great for high intensity strength and Vo2 max intervals.

www.runningwithus.com

@runningwithus

info@runningwithus.com



 **WaterAid**

runningwithus 