

Midweek Conditioning and Sport Specific Training for Walkers

By Tom Dooley, National Coach

Team in Training walkers who are training for a half or full marathon can take advantage of two types of midweek conditioning during their season. There is General Conditioning and Specific Conditioning and both systems are important throughout the season with the emphasis shifting from one to the other as athletes peak for their event.

General Conditioning consists of core and mobility/flexibility work and should be thought of as the base from which specific fitness evolves. Walkers need a broad base of general conditioning to allow them to train longer and more intensely toward the end of the season without breaking down. It is also a safeguard against the injuries that occur with “over-specialization” (focusing on walking only.) Core work and mobility/flexibility conditioning midweek can either supplement or supplant training the first 2-3 weeks of the season when the weekly mileage is lower. It is the ideal time to prepare their broad base of fitness for their season. (Mondays and/or Thursdays are suggested.)

During this conditioning period, each team member can create their own circuits to suit their individual needs. Once the coach has demonstrated the basic dynamic and static series of exercises with the accompanying handouts, each individual can use any or all of them to develop their own program. Virtually all the exercises are available on DVD and www.Youtube.com

Walkers also need additional strength training for those muscle groups that are not heavily stressed by their event and specific training for those that are. In effect this means one type of training for the upper body and another for the legs. As the season progresses, coaches can modify the mid-week schedule to meet the individual needs of their teams.

For most teams, Saturday is the training where teams will gradually increase their mileage so that they can train up to 80-85% of their race distance. Once that mileage has been achieved (11 miles for the half marathon or 22 miles for a full) a gradual tapering to race day begins. Many walkers however, want/need to become faster for their event, particularly where there are time limits for completion of the race distance. Strength endurance circuit training with light weight is the key factor in doing this.

Circuit Training

Create a weight training circuit using a minimum of 6-8 exercises that target the upper body. Select exercises that promote core strength endurance in pairs that balance your body. (eg. bicep:tricep curls/upright rows:lat pulldowns).

Begin with light weight that you can lift comfortably 8-12 times then rest for 60 seconds before moving to the next station until all the exercises are completed. That is one circuit. Try to initially complete 2-3 rotations of the circuit one day per week. As the season progresses, gradually increase the repetitions then add additional sets to your program. When you are comfortable with this workout, consider adding a second day, (Monday or Thursday) making sure there is enough recovery time for your primary mileage day. (TNT Saturdays).

If you reach a plateau, change the workout structure. Four sets of 12 becomes three sets of 15, or five sets of 10, keeping constant the sixty second recovery. The fatigue you encounter in these workouts is the same you may experience at the end of long trainings or races, and the endurance gained is necessary in maintaining race speed in the latter stages of the event.

Recommendations for Circuit Training

- Warm up with any aerobic activity for a minimum of 15 minutes.
- Continue warming up with a circuit of dynamic flexibility exercises targeting the muscles you will be training.
- For each muscle group, perform one warm up set with very light weights.
- Perform 4-6 sets of 8-12 repetitions for each exercise you are doing. Sets can be done in a circuit or continuous.
- Have your athletes record weights, sets, reps and recovery. Recovery from endurance weight training is the most often neglected area.
- After your workout, complete a warm down. Perform 5-10 minutes of very easy aerobic activity, then do a series of static stretches that target the muscles used during the weight training.
- Do not attempt this workout again for at least 48 hours. If you are alternating this workout with **hill training** space each workout to maximize recovery.

There are also training variations to increase leg strength endurance. For our walkers, this must be sport specific and occur mid week (Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday) in addition to the normal TNT Saturday training.

These workouts would replace the calendar training suggestions.

Hill training is critical and has two components: Interval Hill Repetitions and Rolling Hill Loops.

•Interval Hill Repetitions: Create a course where there is a level path or road (no more than 400m long) leading to a moderate incline of 200-600m. The uphill section must be steep enough to exert medium to hard effort but not so severe as to hamper technique. If you have to hike up the second half of the hill it is too steep! The combination of the downhill and the approach/return sections should be long enough to allow almost complete recovery so that the walker can do a sufficient number of repetitions at a pace faster than their normal long distance training pace.

Example: Walker "X" trains consistently on Saturdays at a 16 min/mile pace. One month into the season she begins hill intervals. On an accurately measured 300 meter gradual uphill course, she begins with a series of 8x300 meters with a recovery of an easy 400-600 meters. Her uphill pace is at 13-14 min/mile. Her recovery pace is at least 2 min/mile slower, starting each repetition approximately every 3.5 - 4 minutes. The number of repetitions can be gradually increased to 14-16 as long as the speed remains consistent. At this point (16 repetitions), the athlete has a choice: increase the speed (pace) and start over for 8 repetitions at 13/14 min/mile or increase the distance (400-600m), maintaining the 13/14 min/mile pace and working up again to 14-16 repetitions. The endurance gained is primarily at the higher end of the repetition sets.

(Note: A key element to this workout is NOT to increase speed too quickly and never increase both speed and distance at the same time.)

•Rolling Hills: Another variation is to use a continuous, undulating hill course in either a loop circuit or a point to point course, no longer than 800m. The number of repetitions to begin are the same (8) and your speed is 1 minute per mile faster than your Saturday training speed; and recovery periods are the same. However this type of training is much harder because the athlete is continually altering their technique on the uphill/downhill terrain. The energy spent on these courses consumes much more energy than on flat ground, even on the recovery walks. If the coach finds that their walkers are struggling with this training, increase their recovery so that the minimum number of 8 repetitions can be accomplished. If the athlete still has problems with the speed and number of repetitions, I suggest to return to the first method of uphill repetitions.