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JOURNAL ARTICLES

Efficient Running

The Pose Method

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I have been a swimming coach for over twenty years, and in the swimming world most people understand the importance of technique for becoming a great swimmer. However, in the running world the main focus is on training harder, longer, or faster, and people seem to think you just “naturally” learn to run correctly by doing a lot of it.

Most of the running books I have checked out spend a lot more time on the training of running instead of the technique of running. Even the books that have technique sections don't teach it in a simple-to-follow progressive pattern. Most think of running as more of a conditioning sport than a technique sport like golf or tennis. It is more aerobically based than those two sports, but running with poor form will increase your heart rate and keep you slow, regardless of how much running you do, as well as potentially cause injuries. Technique greatly affects the heart rate and efficiency. Learning to run with efficient technique is a critical skill to economy running.

Recently there has been a lot of talk about the Pose Method of running, but many don't know what it means or what it is about. This article will answer some of those questions.

What is the Pose Method?

The Pose Method is a system of human movement and teaching based on determining the key pose in a movement complex and then working with the laws of nature instead of against them. This is achieved by using

gravity as the primary force for movement instead of muscular energy.

The ability of certain poses to integrate the whole chain of preceding and subsequent movements into one whole, wasting no energy or inconsequential movements, lays the foundation for the Pose Method. Pose is not just for running, even though that's the most popularly known application. It's a unifying theory of movement, and models have been created for swimming, cycling, rowing, skating, and track and field events as well.

Is the Pose Method new?

The Pose Method was first published by Dr. Nicholas Romanov in 1981, and it is in a continual state of refinement both for coaches and athletes as adoption and understanding increase.

The ideas used in the Pose Method have been around a long time. Some of the foundational beliefs of the Pose Method come from famous thinkers of the past who were interested in understanding and articulating the principles of movement, including Leonardo da Vinci, Nikolai Bernstein, and Graham Brown, who in 1912 offered the following description of the relationships among moving bodies, gravity, and work:

“It seems to me that the act of progression itself—whether it be by flight through the air or by such movements as running over surface of the ground—consists essentially in a movement in which the center of gravity of the body is allowed to fall forwards and

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downwards under the action of gravity, and in which the momentum thus gained is used forward, so that from one point in the cycle to the corresponding point in the next, no work is done (theoretically), but the mass of the individual is, in effect, moved horizontally through the environment.”

However, the Pose Method itself is new in that it is the first technique running model that directly takes into consideration the laws of physics, specifically gravity and economy of movement, for understanding how to run efficiently, using the least amount of muscular effort possible.

Is the Pose Method different?

No and yes. It depends. There are runners out there who run beautifully who have never heard of the Pose Method. Either “naturally” or through the help of a coach, they have found the way to run fast using the earth’s natural forces for assistance instead of trying to overcome them.

The Pose Method is different from other approaches to running technique in that it is a systematic pattern of drills designed to teach the body to be in the right space, with the right timing, and to use the laws of nature to help with the movement. This kind of progressive and organic method has long been missing from the running world.

I often compare the Pose Method of running to Total Immersion swimming. Total Immersion doesn’t teach radically different swimming mechanics than other modern technique coaches, but it does teach swimming in a consistent, easily understood progression of drills. It also uses video analysis as a critical factor in the learning process, which is a strong component of the Pose Method as well. I believe it is possible to learn and improve more in a one-hour video analysis lesson or in a one- or two-day clinic than in years of training with incorrect technique.

Key principles

Pose is the best model out there of how to run efficiently. The principles are easy to understand, yet very detailed, and are based on sound principles of correct body mechanics combined with using the laws of nature to assist with movement. The technique promotes faster running with less injury potential.

“Strike a pose”

Holding the correct running posture will allow you to maintain better speed with less effort. Many runners lean forward too much by bending at the hips, which actually pushes them back behind the general center of mass. The hips should be pulled forward under the chest with the head staying in alignment as well (the head should not be forward of the body).



Use gravity to “fall forward”

If you just run in place by popping your heels up quickly you will notice that you start to move forward with just a tiny lean forward. You don’t have to be pushing out the back with your legs to move forward. If anything, the motion of pushing back is throwing your energy in the opposite direction of where you want to travel. Instead, try to redirect your foot forward after contact by allowing the ground reaction and muscle elasticity to pop your foot up off the ground after landing. This can only happen if you are landing under your General Center of Mass (GCM), not with your foot out in front of you. This will feel like you are running with a very compact, small step style, but in fact, your actual distance per stride may actually increase because your general center of mass will be traveling at a faster pace if you aren’t slowing yourself down with each step by landing too far in front of the body.

Pull; don’t push

Try to pull your foot straight up off the ground as your GCM passes over it instead of trying to push-off with the back foot to propel you forward. This keeps the form compact and quicker, while less prone to fatigue or injury because the full range of the limbs is not being used. The knees should never fully straighten at any time while running. A mistake many make is to extend the leg out the back to get a full push-off, but since the general center of mass has already passed by this is a wasted motion.

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Use a small and compact arm carriage

Your elbows should be bent slightly more than 90 degrees and should pump back quickly to match the legs' tempo. Arms should not swing across the body much from side to side, and they should not be carried too low or the knees and heels will also tend to stay very low. However, while a high arm carriage is encouraged, it should not be achieved by keeping the shoulders tense. Relax the shoulders, but run with the elbows bent and arms swinging quickly and held compact to match and assist with the cadence of the legs.

Fast feet

Good runners maintain a minimum of 90 and up to as much as 100+ cycles per minute (180 to 200 steps), so they can use the benefit of ground reaction forces and muscle elasticity to keep them moving with less effort and more rhythm. Runners who don't maintain this kind of tempo absorb more shock through their body and must use much more muscle power to keep them moving forward.

This frequency rate is very similar to cycling cadence. Try to imagine spinning as if you are in the small chain ring on a bike to feel the light effort with rhythmic quickness.



A great tool to help you learn to maintain a 90+ cycle cadence is a device called the Tempo Trainer, which can be set to beep at any cadence desired to help you stay on track. The number on the unit is based on a percentage of a second, so when it is set at 1.0 it beeps once per second or a 60 cadence. Running should be done at 90+ which is .67 on the unit (beeping every threequarters of a second). If the unit was set to .60 it would beep 100 times per minute.

Learning to pose

To really learn how to do the Pose Method of running, it is highly recommended to attend a clinic or take a few private lessons from a certified coach who will videotape you running and take you through a progression of drills to teach your muscles to fire in the right sequence and develop muscle memory and timing. For a list of clinics, coaches and a more complete description of the running technique, visit www.posestech.com.



Michael Collins is the first level-4 certified Pose Method Coach and also trains and certifies other coaches in the Pose Method. He owns [Multisports Orange County](#) in California and is head coach for Orange County's [Nova Masters](#) swimming program. He can be reached at mcollins@multisportsoc.com or 949-338-6682.