



Mountain Running Drills

1 hour moderately hard, ending all out (leaving it all out there!), over steep terrain

The toughest element of mountain running is usually not the leg-searing uphill, but the downhills that shred muscle fibers through eccentric muscle contractions. It might not feel like it at the time, but these descents make everything else much tougher! This workout has benefits for aerobic development and speed, but perhaps the biggest benefit is increasing the body's resilience through controlled breakdown. You'll get sore, but that's the point!

This workout is best done on the steepest terrain possible, that is not too technical. Start under control, then play with effort level, practicing the highs and lows of race day. With 10 minutes to go, pick it up even more, giving it most of what you have in a final one- or two-minute push.

10/8/6/4/2 minute steep hills moderate/hard to hard with run down easy recovery after each

Start each interval under control, finishing with a push that makes it venture into hard territory, where you wouldn't be able to sustain the effort too much longer. Turn around immediately and run back down as if you just crested a climb in a longer race, thinking efficient but not out of control on the descent. At the bottom, turn around and make it happen again. Most people on this sort of thing, say that by the end of the two-minute interval, they couldn't imagine pushing uphill too much more, and certainly not fast. That's good—like a weightlifting session, going to the brink of failure (but not reaching failure) can sometimes lead to major growth.

5-8 x 3-minute steep hills hard with run down easy/moderate after each

Three-minute hills are a sweet spot where most athletes can sustain very high efforts without having to back off. Expect to hit max heart rate here, or even set a new record for yourself!

Start relaxed, finishing each interval with a push to make it a truly quality effort. After five to 10 seconds with hands on knees, turn around and run back to the start smoothly and quickly,

rather than an easy trot. Repeat. You probably don't want to do more than five unless you are a glutton for punishment!

90-plus-minute easy, steep run with a 20-minute hard run near the end, 1-minute easy recovery, followed by 8 x 30-second hills hard with 30 seconds easy between each

This workout fully engages the aerobic system, building up some residual fatigue and depleting energy stores before the big push. Doing hard workouts on fatigued legs shouldn't be encouraged too much, since the goal of training is to improve efficient output, it's helpful to know the feeling, plus there may be neuromuscular benefits that are important for race day.

Near the end of a longer run up to 20 miles, do a strong 20-minute tempo, starting around an effort you could sustain for one hour before progressing to a hard finish in the second half. After an easy minute to recover, do 8 x 30-second hill strides hard with equal easy running recovery. The steeper the terrain, the better, as long as you can run with good form. By the end, you'll feel like you are running in molasses!

6-8 x 2 minutes moderately hard run/hike up steep gradient with 1 minute fast run down recovery, finishing with 5 minutes hard uphill and 5 minutes hard downhill

The mix of ups and downs in mountain running is a uniquely difficult. Give me a race that's all up to start and all down to finish, and the results will be way more predictable than a race with a mix of everything. We all know that feeling of turning back uphill after a fast downhill and not having any legs. This workout addresses that feeling.

Run/hike up in a controlled manner, not finishing with the hard efforts like in the past intervals, but around what you could sustain for a half hour. After finishing each interval, immediately turn around and do a fast run back. By the end, you shouldn't be too fried. Good, because that was just a warm up. Now, do a hard 10-minute tempo (comfortably hard) with five minutes up, and five minutes back. You'll finish feeling a bit pounded, so make sure this one has a bunch of recovery afterward.

10-20 x 1 minute moderately hard running/1 minute fast walking, finishing with an all-out 5 minute run

In mountain running, walking/hiking is one of the most important skills. It's essential to train hiking specifically but it's also needed to train transitioning from hiking to running and back, which can use excess energy if you aren't used to it. This workout gives you a good feel for the transition, letting them practice efficient form, while also getting a good aerobic stimulus.