

# Keep On Burnin'

Make your treadmill workouts more fun

By: Scott Quill

Treadmills make me feel like a lab rat: caged in a gym, getting nowhere, with a vague sense that life is pointless. Which got me wondering how scientists keep their clueless little research rodents running on treadmills in their experiments.

Turns out it's Cheerios. Cheerios and a little electrical shock if they slow down.

"It's a very small current. But they don't seem to like it," Steven Britton, Ph.D., a professor of physiology at the Medical College of Ohio, tells me. After a session, he says, he rewards each rat with a Cheerio. "In Norway," he mentions, "they give them a little piece of chocolate."

Intriguing. But shock therapy isn't going to happen at my gym. And chocolate is part of the sweet holiday minefield that puts me and other men on the treadmill in the first place. Then Britton, being a scientist, makes an intuitive leap: "If people are informed of the consequences of being overweight and not exercising, that's kind of a little shocker."

Eureka! So I, being a journalist, twisted his idea and did some research, making a negative jolt a positive push:

- Men who exercised for 30 minutes on a treadmill boosted their levels of phenylacetic acid—a natural antidepressant—by 77 percent. Perfect for gloomy winter days.
- Running for an hour or more per week reduces your chance of coronary heart disease by 42 percent, according to Harvard researchers.
- Running on a treadmill instead of on roads reduces your chances of a stress fracture by at least 48 percent, a study showed.

Taping these findings to the treadmill's control panel would help. But here are some more practical boredom busters that will make your time on the belt seem to go faster. For all of these, make sure you jog easily for 5 minutes to warm up, jog another 5 to cool down, and stretch afterward. Then go ahead, have a Cheerio.

## 1. Mix it Up with incline intervals.

The term "intervals" usually means a series of short, hard runs interspersed with jogging or walking. In this variation, instead of speeding up for the hard stints, you increase the incline. The high level of effort will improve your power, says Tony Veney, a track coach at UCLA. Here's how: Set the treadmill's speed for about half of your full effort. Set the incline at 3 percent and run for 20 to 30 seconds, then return to a zero incline for 30 seconds. Repeat this sequence at 5 percent, and then 7 percent. That's one repetition. Do eight to 10 repetitions.

## 2. Try TV time-outs.

If there's a television in your gym (or basement), use it to time your "pickups" (sustained intervals in which you pick up the pace), suggests Budd Coates, a four-time qualifier for the Olympic Marathon trials and special contributor to *Runner's World* magazine. Say you're watching a basketball game. Whenever the clock stops (time-outs, foul shots), bump up your pace to about 80 percent effort. When the game's in progress, dial down to a jog. It works with any sport or any TV show. Run hard during Katie's segments; jog during Matt's. Or, when

Bill O'Reilly gets rude, pick up the pace; when he's being civil, jog. (Warning: You need to be in good shape for this one.)

### **3. Take a shot at negative splits.**

No, this doesn't refer to an uptight cheerleader. This concept burns fat, makes the time fly, and will help you in your next race. "Negative splits" means you're running faster at the end than at the start. In this session, start at a jog, and at every quarter mile, punch the speed button one beep higher. (You can do this for any length interval.) Push this as long as you like, but give yourself a smooth cooldown. Breaking the run into chunks makes it less tedious, and training your body to start slow and end fast will pay off next time you're in a road race; you'll hold back at the start when your adrenaline is high, and finish strong when others fade.

### **4. Live on the edge.**

This goes against all those lawyers' warnings, but it works for David Deubelbeiss, the Boss of the Belt. He's a Toronto ultramarathoner who set a world record by running 130.82 miles on a treadmill in 24 hours. (And who knows boredom better than a Canadian?) His tip: When you get bored, slow your stride (not the speed of the treadmill) so you drift toward the back edge of the belt. When your heels touch the end, quickly step up to the front. Do this at a relatively slow belt speed, warns Deubelbeiss, and don't try it until you can run without looking at any part of the treadmill for 30 seconds.

### **5. Crest that hill.**

This drill from Jane Hahn, a senior editor at Runner's World, will help you run hills effectively, attacking the slope and exploding over the top. It'll also help you put on bursts of speed on the flat. Run for 3 minutes at a 3 percent incline, then flatten it out and maintain the same level of effort by speeding up the belt a few notches for 1 minute. Recover with a minute of jogging, and then repeat the sequence three times.

### **6. Power up the tunes!**

Load your MP3 player wisely. A British study found that men can handle much higher workloads when listening to music that builds in tempo from slow to fast, rather than maintaining a consistently fast beat. So start out slow with Coldplay, mix in some White Stripes, and end with the Ramones. A great runner's player is the tiny iRiver iFP-390T. It holds up to 8 hours of music, has an FM tuner and a voice recorder, and straps to your arm. \$200. [bestbuy.com](http://bestbuy.com)

### **7. Watch yourself.**

Use your club's mirrors for something other than checking out the redhead wearing the Under Armour. Look at yourself occasionally, especially when running fast. "Monitoring your stride mechanics gives you something to concentrate on, and you'll run more efficiently," says Bob Larsen, coach of the USA men's distance runners for the 2004 Olympics. Larsen's checklist: (1) Minimize your contact with the belt. Don't bounce; think quick feet. (2) Stand tall so all your body segments are aligned. (3) Stay loose and relaxed.

### **8. Use a heart-rate monitor.**

If you're bored with the readouts on the treadmill, add another source of input: a heart-rate monitor. "You should train at 60 to 80 percent of your maximum heart rate, because as you exceed 80 percent, results do not increase proportionally to your work," says Richard Stein, M.D., a spokesman for the American Heart Association. See how inclines affect your rate, and notice how quickly your heart recovers from a burst of effort.