

Cross Country Tips

Mileage is everything. In most cross country races you run 3.1 miles, that's no joke. You aren't going to run a great race if you only train a few times a week. If you're new to cross country, you need to realize that summer training is everything. It makes it so much easier on you when the season rolls around because you've already built up your endurance now you can focus entirely on the speed. *note: if you are new to xc and you joined after the summer had ended, do not be alarmed, you'll still be able to run, it's just going to require even more work*

Do other exercises besides running. This is called cross training. It's important to not just run but do other things along with running such as biking, swimming, even walking. I'm not telling you to replace your run with these things I'm saying do them along with a run. Swimming is really easy to work in your schedule in the summer. When school starts if you live close you can ride your bike or walk to school. It's easy to get other types of exercise into your routine.

Along with #2, work out your core. Your core needs to be strong for cross country. Just trust me on this, your core is helping you move quicker up hills, through rough terrain or tall grass. Try incorporating an ab workout 3-5 times a week and see the difference it makes. Weight lifting is good too, but for distance runners it's better to do lower weight with higher reps rather than high weight and low reps.

Diet plays a role in performance. Ever heard the term "look good, feel good"? Well, in cross country, if you eat well, you run well. Try to work a fruit or vegetable (or both!) into every meal. Don't skip breakfast. Drink plenty of water, and try to not drink (or cut out completely) soda pop. Fast food is another I'd recommend quitting just because it's terrible for you. You know what else is bad for your health? School lunch, try packing it. Even if it's just once a week it'd make the difference.

Get to know the other runners, AND your coach. These are the people you'll be running with the next several months. Learn who is who. Get to know them, figure out their paces. Running with a group is an excellent tool and you should use it to your advantage. When you're alone there is no one there to push you but if you're with a group of people you have someone you can stick with. You can use it as a training tool, find someone close to your current pace, run with them on the easy days. Find someone close to your goal pace and run with them during the hard workouts. Getting to know your coach is also essential because they are going to be the one assigning you workouts and you don't want to be on their bad side.

Get physically AND MENTALLY tough. I once heard that cross country is 10% physical and 90% mental and that couldn't be more true. Even the best runners sometimes let it get to them. Words to erase from your vocabulary right now are "I can't". Because you CAN. When you think that you can't it's actually because you don't want to, but that's the thing about cross country is at the time you don't realize if you want to or not. But you do. You can either feel happy or mad at the finish the choice is yours but either way you are going to finish the race. Why not give it your all?

But don't over think it. I find myself getting caught up over my pace or the weather or the fact that I didn't run over the weekend or I didn't drink enough water, or I feel like I didn't eat enough — at some point I said "Cut the crap. Just relax and run". When you start freaking out about your run don't. Try not to think about running or how bad it hurts, try just to relax and ENJOY it, because running can be really relaxing when you strip away all the dynamics of it.