

# What is the best way to pace when I run a race?

By John Ruibal, MS, RD, CSSD, LD

There are many philosophies on pacing. My philosophy on this subject is to look at world records and mimic the strategy that these athletes use to produce their best times. When you look at world records from the 800 meters all the way through the marathon you find runners run negative splits. So what do I mean by negative split? A negative split is running the second half of your race faster than the first half. The trick is to run only 1-2% faster the second half. This is harder than it seems and it takes practice. Follow these steps to help you run the second half of your race faster than the first half.

1. Run a one mile time trial all out to get your current fitness level. Use an online calculator to predict your pace for the race you will be running. A better alternative is talk to an experienced coach to give you guidance and set realistic pacing goals. They have the experience, and knowledge to evaluate how you have been training, look at your goals and give you a more precise pacing plan than an online calculator or chart.
2. Run tempo runs for time on an out and back course. This is a good training session to see if you are starting to fast or too slow. I like doing this workout with a group. The goal is for the runners to run out on a course for half the time for the workout and then turn around and run back to where they started. This allows the faster runners to work at their pace as well as the slower runners. If you pace yourself correctly you will get back to where you started or just past. If you don't make it back work on going out a little slower. If you get way past where you start then you need to start a little faster. In a group setting everyone will start together and if all goes well they will finish close together. Make sure to do a good warm up of at least a mile and a cooldown of at least a mile. The tempo run should be at least 20 minutes and no more than 60 minutes.
3. Be confident in your training and stay controlled in the early part of your race. When you get to your race don't push from the start. Let the race develop. Start out at a controlled pace, slowly accelerate so that you are at goal pace about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the distance you are racing. When you are 600 - 800 meters, about a half mile from the finish start you kick, leave everything you have out on the course. I see it too many times when runners wait until they see the finish line and sprint leaving a good amount of time on the race course.

Pacing takes practice and pacing during racing is a combination of your training, experience and realistic goals. Follow the three tips and you will be on your way to faster times.