

A person is running on a treadmill. The image is a close-up, low-angle shot focusing on the person's legs and feet. They are wearing black leggings and bright pink sneakers with white soles. The treadmill belt is visible in the foreground. The background is blurred, showing other people in a gym setting. A semi-transparent dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title text in white.

The Intensity Pyramid Workout

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This is an intermediate running workout that is perfect for the treadmill but can be completed on any running surface.

It's a good idea for most runners to experiment with intensity. If we run at the same easy pace all the time, we don't train our bodies to improve. Our body adapts over time, so in order to continue to progress, it's important to change some variables to avoid plateaus in our running performance. Interval workouts are an effective way to add in bouts of higher intensity activity to our workouts to send the signal to our body to continue to get stronger and faster.

With this intensity pyramid workout, we'll start out at a moderate intensity to warm up, then every three minutes increase intensity. Once we reach peak intensity, we'll back off and work our way back down the pyramid.

I use intensity as a guide instead of assigning paces when I share workouts on the internet because there are a wide variety of fitness levels that read this blog. One runner might find that a nine-minute mile pace is their high-intensity pace, while that may feel like an easy jog for another. When you determine the pace by intensity or the [Rate of Perceived Exertion](#) and the talk test, you always work at our own fitness level. If you're interested in workouts that are customized to your individual fitness level, see me about online run coaching.

Intensity can be increased by running faster or increasing the elevation. If you are on a treadmill you could increase the incline to increase the intensity without increasing the speed.

18 minutes

THE INTENSITY PYRAMID WORK OUT



RPE 5

**GET WARM
3 MINUTES**

RPE 7

**GET GOING
3 MINUTES**

RPE 9

**GET AFTER IT!
3 MINUTES**

RPE 7

**KEEP GOING
3 MINUTES**

RPE 5

**KEEP COOL
3 MINUTES**

RPE 3

**RECOVER
3 MINUTES**

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You can learn more about [finding your perfect running pace in this article](#).

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RPE CHART

rate of perceived exertion

10

MAXIMUM EFFORT

COMPLETELY OUT OF BREATH, UNABLE TO TALK

9

EXTREMELY HARD EFFORT

CAN ONLY SPEAK A WORD OR TWO AT A TIME

7-8

HARD EFFORT

OUT OF BREATH, CAN SPEAK A SENTENCE OR TWO.

4-6

MODERATE EFFORT

CAN CARRY ON A CONVERSATION

2-3

LIGHT EFFORT

BREATHING IS EASY

1

NO EFFORT

SITTING

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GET WARM: 3 MINUTES

After a dynamic warm-up, start your workout at an RPE 5. This is a moderate intensity pace, not too easy, not too hard. You should be able to hold a full conversation at this pace.

GET GOING: 3 MINUTES

Time to pick up the intensity to a RPE 7. You can do this by either increasing speed or increasing elevation. This pace should feel a little harder than your first three minutes but not so hard that you can't maintain the pace for three minutes. At a RPE 7 you are out of breath, but you can speak a few words or a sentence between gasps of breath.

GET AFTER IT: 3 MINUTES

This is your highest intensity interval. At an RPE 9, you probably can only get out one or two words at a time (and they might sound like swear words). It is a near-max effort, but three minutes can feel like an eternity in treadmill time, so make sure you choose a pace that you can maintain for three minutes. If you want to shorten this interval to one or two minutes, do what is best for your body. Never arbitrarily follow a workout on the internet. Start with one minute if you need to, then work to build up to three minutes for your highest intensity interval over several weeks or months. Always work at your own fitness level to avoid injury, frustration, and burnout.

KEEP GOING: 3 MINUTES

Time to start coming down. Lower the intensity of your top effort and stay strong for three minutes.

KEEP COOL: 3 MINUTES

Bring the intensity down another notch for three more minutes.

RECOVER: 3 MINUTES

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Recover by walking or jogging for three minutes or however long it takes for your breath to fully recover.

Although this is a short workout, it is a high-intensity workout and is appropriate for advanced or intermediate runners who have a solid running base of at least 10-15 consistent miles per week for at least six to eight weeks. If you are a beginner runner, work on improving your endurance and consistency before attempting a high-intensity interval run.

Always allow at least 48 hours between hard effort workouts. Our bodies adapt (get stronger and faster) during the rest period after the workout, not during the workout itself. If you don't allow your body the proper time to repair, recover and build, you won't see the full benefit of your hard efforts. Most runners will thrive on just one or two high-intensity workouts per week. Highly trained athletes with an optimized recovery protocol may be able to handle three.

Give it a shot and let me know how it goes.

Like this post? Know someone who would benefit? It helps me when you share with your friends and followers. www.leagendersfitness.com

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I am a NASM personal trainer and RRCA adult distance running coach that specializes in strength training for runners. I offer in-person training in the Fort Worth Shred Shed, online run coaching and nutrition coaching. If you are interested in a more in-depth running or strength training plan, please contact me at www.leagendersfitness.com. Have questions? I'd love to help. While I am a certified personal trainer, I am not your personal trainer. Since I don't know your exercise abilities, injury background or medical history, please see your doctor before beginning any new exercise program. This is an opinion blog. No information in this blog is intended to be taken as medical advice or prescription. Please see your doctor and/or registered dietitian for any health concerns.

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