



ENDURANCE TRAINING / PRACTICAL GUIDE

Why Your Easy Runs Should Feel Almost Too Easy

The discipline to slow down is what gives your quality work room to count.

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Moore Performance athlete image

THE TRAINING TRAP

The pace that feels productive can quietly blunt the week.

Most endurance athletes we meet are not short of effort. The bigger problem is that too much of the week lands in a middle ground: a little too hard to recover from, but not purposeful enough to be a true quality session.

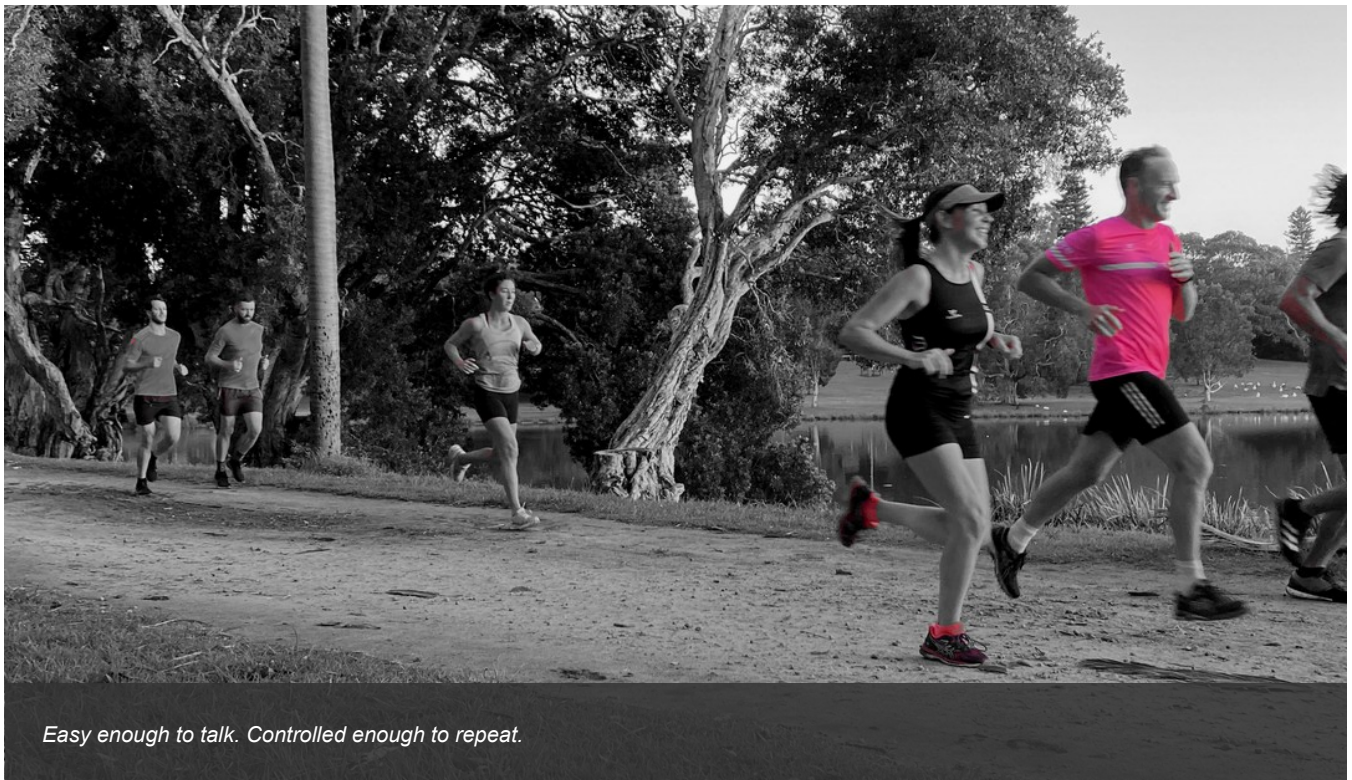
Coaches often call it the grey zone. It feels like training because breathing is up and the watch looks respectable. Repeated often enough, though, it can leave an athlete carrying low-level fatigue into the sessions that were meant to be decisive.

THE SIMPLE TEST

Could you speak in full sentences and finish knowing you had more? If not, the run may not be as easy as the plan requires.

THE COACHING POINT

Easy is not wasted training. It is controlled training - low enough to absorb, repeat and build around.



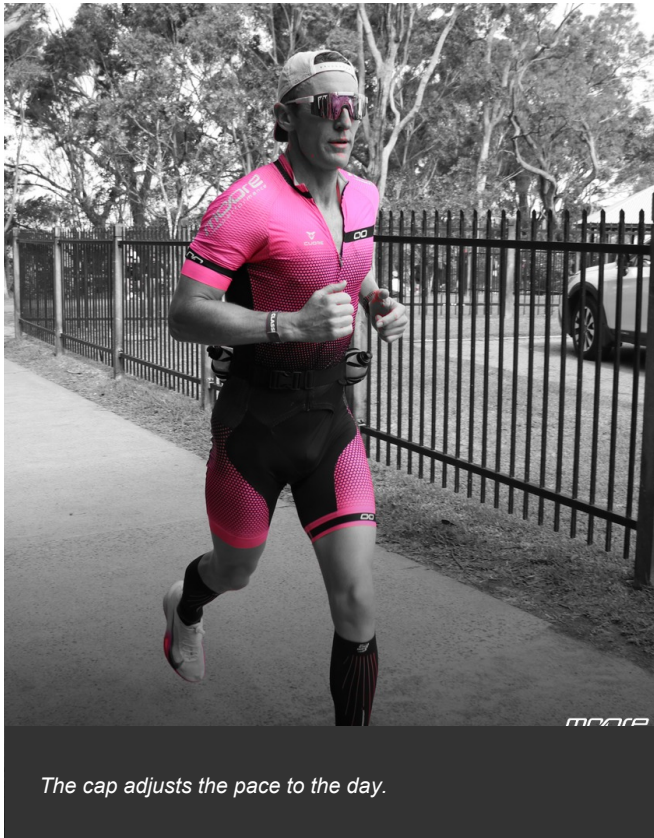
Easy enough to talk. Controlled enough to repeat.

WHAT MAF ACTUALLY IS

A practical ceiling - not a laboratory measurement.

MAF stands for Maximum Aerobic Function, a method developed by Dr Phil Maffetone. In day-to-day coaching, its usefulness is simple: it gives an athlete a heart-rate ceiling for aerobic work.

The word ceiling matters. It is not a target to chase for the full run. On hills, in heat or when fatigue is high, staying under it may mean slowing down or walking briefly. That is the discipline, not a failure.



The cap adjusts the pace to the day.

CEILING, NOT TARGET

Set the upper limit. Let pace float underneath it. The session succeeds when effort stays controlled.

ONE TOOL, NOT THE PROGRAMME

MAF can guide easy running. It does not replace threshold testing, sport-specific zones, session purpose or coach judgement.

USE THE NUMBER TO HOLD BACK,
not to prove fitness on an easy day.

TRAIN FOR THE GOAL, NOT THE FEED.

Stop chasing average pace on Strava

or worrying what others think. An easy run is successful when it serves the programme - not when it looks fast online.

THE MAF 180 FORMULA

Start with 180 minus age. Then apply context.

Use the calculation as an opening estimate. Choose the one adjustment below that best reflects your current health and training history.

-10

Recovering from major illness or surgery, in rehabilitation, or taking regular medication.

-5

Injured, regressing or plateaued, frequently unwell, inconsistent, new to training, or returning.

0

Training consistently for up to two years, progressing, and without the concerns above.

+5

Training consistently for more than two years, improving, and remaining free of injury.

EXAMPLE

A 45-year-old who has trained consistently for more than two years, is still improving and is injury-free: $180 - 45 + 5 = 140$ bpm.

IMPORTANT CAVEAT

The formula is not a measured aerobic threshold. If you have good lab data or a properly conducted field test, use that individual evidence. Medication or health concerns should be discussed with an appropriate clinician.

MEASURE THE TREND

Same heart rate. Same course. A clearer signal.

The test is more useful than guessing whether easy running is working. Repeat it under comparable conditions and look for the direction of travel, not a heroic single result.

01**Warm up**

Run very easily for 12-15 minutes.

02**Settle**

Move to your MAF ceiling on flat ground or a track.

03**Record**

Run 5 km and capture every kilometre split.

04**Repeat**

Retest in 4-6 weeks under similar conditions.

YOUR FIVE-KILOMETRE RECORD

SPLIT	TIME	HR / NOTES
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KM 1**KM 2****KM 3****KM 4****KM 5****WITHIN THE TEST**

A small slowdown can be normal. A large fade is a prompt to check pacing, conditions, fuelling and accumulated fatigue.

ACROSS TESTS

At a similar heart rate, faster splits with less fade can indicate improving aerobic durability. Judge several comparable tests.

Keep the comparison honest

Use the same route, similar time of day, similar shoes and, where possible, similar weather. Heat, terrain, sleep, stress, illness and fuelling can move the result. Record them rather than explaining them away.

A black and white photograph of a group of runners on a dirt trail in a forest. The runners are in motion, and the background is filled with trees and foliage. The text is overlaid on the top left of the image.

Easy enough to absorb. Specific enough to progress.

Conversation pace is a useful cross-check when heart rate is noisy.

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HOW WE USE IT

MAF is not the whole programme. It is one guardrail inside an individualised plan. We set sport-specific zones from useful testing - such as critical swim speed (CSS) in the pool and a properly conducted run test - then match every session to a clear purpose.

For many endurance athletes, most weekly volume should stay genuinely low intensity, with a smaller share reserved for purposeful harder work. "80/20" is useful shorthand, not a prescription that suits every athlete, phase or sport.

THE REAL JOB

Protect the easy days so the athlete can absorb volume and arrive ready for the quality that matters.

READ THE ATHLETE

Heart rate, pace, perceived effort, recovery, life stress and session history belong in the same conversation.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Four steps. Six weeks. Better evidence.

1

Set the ceiling

Calculate a starting MAF number, then check it against any reliable individual testing you already have.

2

Run the baseline

Complete the 5 km test on a repeatable flat route and record the conditions.

3

Keep easy honest

Stay below the ceiling. Slow down early, walk steep hills and leave the ego at home.

4

Retest and review

Repeat in 4-6 weeks. Look at pace, fade, recovery and the wider training block together.

**READY TO SET YOUR ZONES PROPERLY?**

If your easy days keep drifting into the middle, we can help you turn the numbers into a week that fits your physiology, goals and life.

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EVIDENCE WITHOUT OVERCLAIMING

Useful guardrails, applied to the individual.

The practical message is strong: keep low-intensity work genuinely controlled, preserve room for purposeful quality, and judge progress with repeatable data. The limits matter too.

MAF IS A METHOD

The 180-minus-age number is the starting point in Maffetone's method. It is not a direct measurement of VO₂max, lactate threshold or the first ventilatory threshold.

80/20 IS SHORTHAND

A high proportion of low-intensity work is common in successful endurance programmes, but the exact distribution depends on the athlete, sport, phase and how intensity is counted.

ADAPTATION IS NOT EXCLUSIVE

Endurance training can support mitochondrial and capillary adaptation. Current evidence does not justify claiming those changes belong only to one narrow heart-rate formula.

References and further reading

- 1 Maffetone P. The MAF 180 Formula: Heart-rate monitoring for real aerobic training. Method origin, formula and adjustment categories. philmaffetone.com/180-formula/
- 2 Seiler S. What is best practice for training intensity and duration distribution in endurance athletes? *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance*. 2010;5(3):276-291. doi:10.1123/ijspp.5.3.276.
- 3 Munoz I, Seiler S, Bautista J, et al. Does polarized training improve performance in recreational runners? *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance*. 2014;9(2):265-272. doi:10.1123/ijspp.2012-0350.
- 4 Effects of exercise training on mitochondrial and capillary growth in human skeletal muscle: a systematic review and meta-regression. *Sports Medicine*. 2024. PMID:39390310.
- 5 Oliveira PS, Bopp G, Fonseca H. Comparison of polarized versus other types of endurance training intensity distribution on athletes' endurance performance: a systematic review with meta-analysis. *Sports Medicine*. 2024;54(8):2071-2095. doi:10.1007/s40279-024-02034-z.

COACHING INFORMATION, NOT MEDICAL ADVICE

Health concerns, medication effects and return from illness or surgery require appropriate clinical guidance.