

# How to Safely Train for an Adventure Race

Explore this Article ■ [Conditioning Your Body](#) ■ [Honing Your Skills](#) ■ [Preparing Your Mind](#) ■ [References](#)

Co-authored by Michele Dolan 🌱, Jennifer Mueller, JD , and 3 contributors

Last Updated: May 15, 2019

Whether you're an avid outdoorsman, or bored with your exercise routine and seeking a new fitness challenge, adventure racing may be just what you've been looking for. With running, hiking, climbing, mountain biking, and paddling, an adventure race is like a triathlon gone wild. Competing in teams of two or more, you'll navigate your way through the wilderness day and night on a race that tests your mental and physical endurance to the limits. To safely train for an adventure race, start slow and build a strong base of aerobic fitness. Then you can focus on improving your form and technique in each of the disciplines included in your average adventure race.[1]

Part  
1

## Part 1 of 3: Conditioning Your Body



- 1 Start training at least six months in advance.** Because of the various disciplines involved in training for an adventure race, you should give yourself plenty of time to prepare. Starting early allows you to get your body in peak condition before you focus on specific skills.[2]
  - You will start with base training, which increases your body's cardiovascular fitness and trains you for endurance sports.
  - After a month or two of base training, you will move to more intense phases, in which you are actively training for the race while also strengthening your skills and technique in the various disciplines that are tested during an adventure race.
  - Allowing at least six months to train for your first adventure race ensures that you can both train and participate in the adventure race safely, and that your body is in peak condition.



**2 Build strong base fitness.** A strong foundation of aerobic fitness ensures you have the strength to endure long hours on even the toughest endurance course. Start your training slow to build your aerobic fitness and make your body more efficient.<sup>[3]</sup>

- Working at a lower intensity builds your body's aerobic fitness and trains you for endurance. Your body will burn fat rather than carbs, which helps you sustain energy during endurance activities.
- Ideally, you'll want to spend at least 12 weeks in the base training phase of your training. After that, you can work into the build phase, when you improve your skills in the various disciplines. You'll gradually ramp up the intensity of your training sessions until you reach your peak within weeks of the race itself.
- Invest in a heart-rate monitor (if you don't already have one) and keep track of your heart rate while conditioning. During base training, you shouldn't move beyond the first two zones, the recovery and endurance zones. This equates to between 50 and 70 percent of your maximum heart rate.
- At your peak training level, you'll be working at around 80 percent of your maximum heart rate.

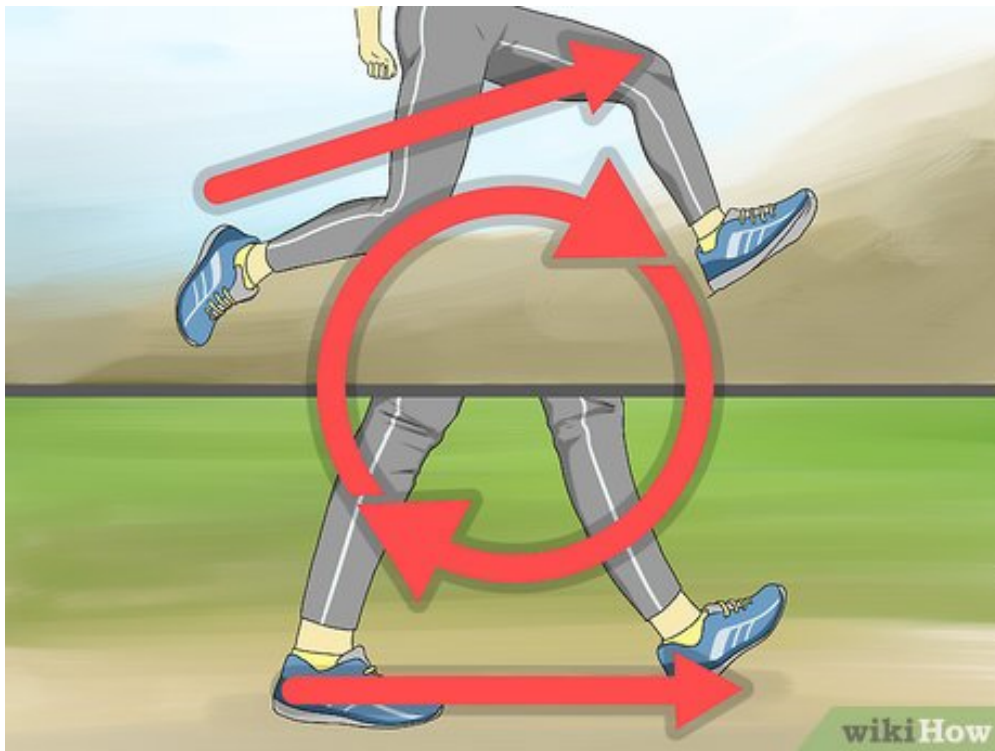
**3 Focus on duration.** Since adventure racing is an endurance sport, your conditioning workouts need to be at least as long as the race itself is going to be. Training yourself to go longer will make a shorter race easier and give you more room to increase your pace.<sup>[4]</sup>

- If your adventure race is more than 12 hours long, use a marathon training plan. Try to do most of your running on trails rather than on a paved road. If your adventure race is less than 12 hours in duration, you can follow a half-marathon plan.
- You can spend as little as three or four days a week training, but you may want to train for five or six days a week, particularly when you are doing lower intensity exercise during your base training stage.
- Remember that an adventure race is an endurance event. You're not going to train for a 12-hour race by working out 20 minutes a day three or four days a week. Not training enough is a good way to ensure you'll get wiped out – or worse, injured – within the first few hours of the race.



**4 Don't push yourself too hard.** When you have a grueling adventure race in mind, it can be easy to go too hard during your first weeks of training. However, pushing your body to its limit during conditioning can lead to injury.[5]

- Your training is a time to focus on your skills and technique. When you're working at full intensity it's difficult to correct your form or even pay attention to small details.
- Lower intensity workouts, on the other hand, give you the opportunity to make small tweaks that will increase the efficiency of your movements during the race.
- Working at a high intensity is a good way to get injured during training and never even get to the race – especially if you're training nearly every day. Training at a lower intensity means you don't need as much recovery time between training sessions.



**5 Transition to hill running and walking.** Hiking and hill-climbing work different muscle groups than running or walking on flat ground, so after a month or so of base training you can start to incorporate these activities into your routine.<sup>[6]</sup>

- During your hill climbing, stay at about 80 percent effort to continue to build your endurance. Try several sets of a hill that takes less than five minutes to climb.
- Start including interval training into your overall regimen to continue building cardiovascular strength and efficiency while you also build your strength.
- Include scrambling up hills on varieties of terrain, including mud and slippery slopes. This activity also uses different muscle groups, and you want to make sure all are as evenly conditioned as possible.
- Replicate a variety of race conditions as much as possible, so you'll be ready regardless of what happens in the race.



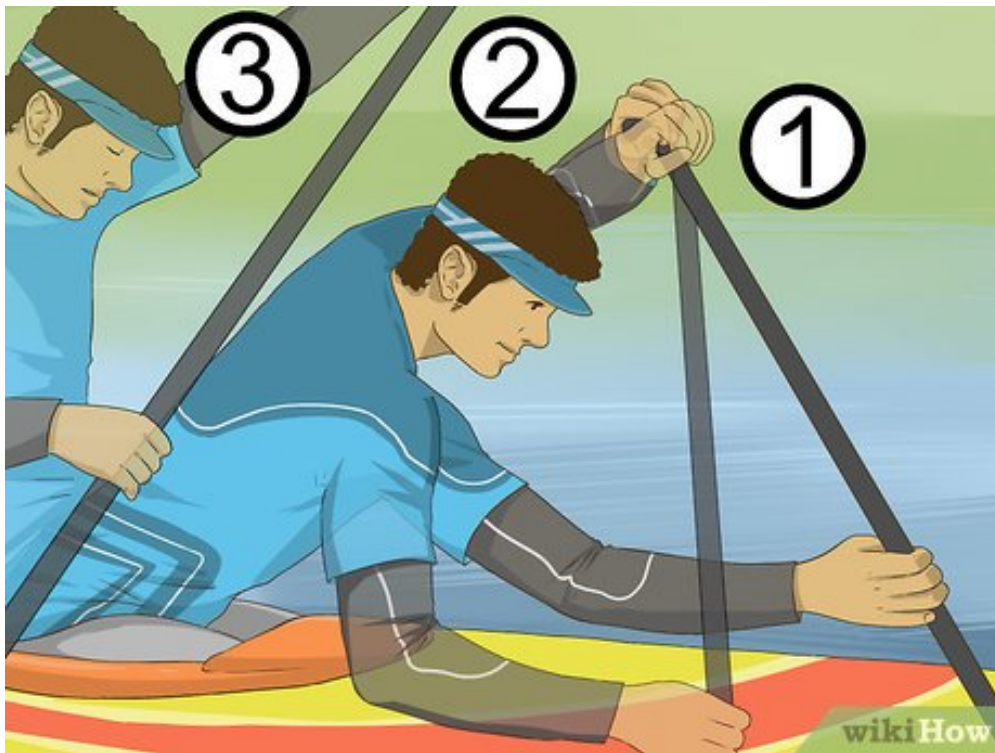
**6 Devote ample training time to each discipline.** Review the information for your particular adventure race and figure out which disciplines will be included. That way you can start dividing your training sessions up so that each discipline is covered equally.<sup>[7]</sup>

- Keep in mind that if you're less familiar with one discipline, you'll need to spend more time with it – at least initially – to bring your skills up to speed with everything else.
- Hire a good trainer or coach to teach you correct technique for disciplines with which you have little to no experience.
- It's important to learn basic safety skills and first aid in tandem with technique. For example, while you should work on a good paddling technique and an efficient stroke, you also should learn basic water and boat safety so you don't panic if your boat overturns.
- For disciplines that may occur after nightfall, make sure you do training at night so you're accustomed to moving in the dark.





- 1 Practice with your race gear.** Throughout your training, you want to carry a 10-15 pound pack with items similar to what you'll be carrying during the race itself. You also want to wear similar clothing and the same shoes in which you plan to run the race.<sup>[8]</sup>
  - While training, you'll be able to tell if your pack is uncomfortable. You also can make sure that food and water is easily accessible to you when you need it, and make adjustments where necessary. This will keep you from panicking during the race if you can't get to something you need.
  - Wearing trail shoes provides more support and protection for your feet, and provide much better grip and traction on soft or slippery terrain. They can also keep you from getting blisters like you potentially would if you wore regular running shoes.
  - Take care of your feet and remove calluses to avoid getting deep blisters during the race.
  - Especially if you're training during the day, wear sunscreen year-round and insect repellent in warmer months.
  - Make sure you train with team members or with a coach or buddy – don't go hiking alone, even on a familiar trail where you've been many times. Include general items in your pack such as duct tape and rope that can easily be converted into makeshift assistance or support for a team member in trouble, as well as basic first aid supplies.



**2 Learn a strong stroke technique for paddling.** Many adventure race competitors are triathletes, which means rowing may not be their strongest discipline. Focusing on your paddling can enable you to build a significant time lead in the race if you have a strong, efficient stroke.<sup>[9]</sup>

- Keep in mind that you could be paddling in any kind of water, so make sure you have experience in everything from placid lakes to whitewater, even ocean swells if your adventure race will be held near the coast.
- Focus on keeping your arms fully extended, and get your power from your core rather than from your arms. Use the twisting of your body to generate your stroke, not movement in your arms.
- Find a canoe or kayak club that you can paddle with to get more experience in racing-type conditions. Practicing in a boat without a rudder is ideal, since you'll have experience steering a rudderless craft. Many of the boats provided by adventure race organizers are rudderless.
- Try to fit in at least one or two long paddle sessions of between one and two hours over the course of your training.
- Long strokes with good form will get you across the body of water faster than a greater number of short strokes.



**3 Train with a group.** Not only is training in a group motivational, but there is always safety in numbers – especially if you're training in wooded areas far from the beaten path. Team members and training partners can help you out as well as giving you tips on how to improve your form and technique.[10]

- Ideally, your team members will be skilled in different disciplines, so you can rely on each other to push the team forward on each leg of the race and give each team member a chance to lead.
- Include others who are skilled in specific disciplines, such as rowing or climbing, so you can learn new techniques from them.
- During your training, you will likely be exposed to situations that will enable you to figure out how you can help other team members out if disaster strikes out on the trail.





**4 Use ample lights when biking at night.** While affixing a large light to your bike will add considerable weight, it will be worth it for the safety it provides – especially if you're biking on a difficult or technical trail.<sup>[1]</sup> Use LED lights since they weigh less. You may also want to wear an LED headlamp.

- Keep in mind that trails typically aren't lit at all, and often one wrong turn could send you tumbling off into a ravine. Both in training and in the race itself, you shouldn't sacrifice safety in the belief that you'll make your load lighter.
- Rig your bikes with towlines and hooks so you can get bikes out of bad situations if need be. Retractable dog leashes can work well as towlines and won't take up a lot of room in your pack.
- Practice riding on your teammates' bikes as well as your own so if you have to switch bikes or bike parts for some reason you'll still be comfortable.



**5 Use climbing walls to perfect your climbing technique.** Some adventure races include a climbing or rappelling component. While you may be able to go around these rock faces, you'll lose precious time doing so.[12]

- Unless you're going on a longer adventure race or an expedition race, you may not have much use for climbing skills. Check the information for your adventure race carefully so you can plan your training time accordingly.
- Practicing rappelling with your team also enhances trust and bonding among team members, which will be a crucial mental component going into the race.
- When you're doing any climbing, make sure your pack is secured and your hair is tied back out of your face. You don't want anything to get caught up in your rappelling equipment, or to fall off the side of a cliff.



- 1 Read the information provided by the race organizers.** When you register for your adventure race, you'll receive detailed information about the course of the race, the obstacles or challenges you will face, and the skills that will be tested.<sup>[13]</sup>
  - Use this information as a blueprint for your training regimen. If there's any component of the race in which you have little experience, use your training time to get comfortable with that skill and learn how to complete that leg of the race safely.
  - Study the route the race will take until you're relatively familiar with it. If you have the opportunity to do so, you may want to do part of your training in the same area where the race itself will take place.



**2 Work on orienteering and navigation.** Almost all adventure races have a navigation element, which will require you to read and understand a topographical map and navigate using a compass. In the age of GPS systems, this may be an area where you need a lot of practice.<sup>[14]</sup>

- Shortchanging this aspect of preparation or assuming you'll be able to pick it up on the fly can have serious negative consequences for you and your teammates during the race.
- Buy a book or research orienteering online, and study until you have the basics down. Then you may want to consider joining an orienteering club or attending a class or camp so you can test your skills in a real-world situation.
- If you do join a club, pay attention to the technique of more seasoned members. Ask questions, and pick up as many tricks and shortcuts as you can to make this skill easier for you to do quickly and efficiently.



**3 Check your equipment thoroughly.** In the days before the race, make sure all equipment is functioning properly and any systems you've rigged will actually perform as you've designed them to perform.<sup>[15]</sup>

- Test safety devices and harnesses to make sure they're going to operate correctly if you need them during the race.
- Make sure you know everything you have and how to access it. You also should know what your teammates are carrying and how they can access their gear.
- Pack plenty of food and water for everyone, including sports gels for energy and other snacks that can be eaten quickly for efficient fuel on the trail.





**4 Commit to your team.** An adventure race is a team sport. Whether you have a single partner or a larger team, your bond with each other is perhaps more important than your speed and skill. Work together with commitment to each other and you will be successful.<sup>[16]</sup>

- During training as well as during the race itself, be aware of your teammates at all times. If someone is having a problem, you'll need to be able to help them as a team and get them back in the race.
- All team members should have mutual respect for each other and treat the event as a team effort rather than an individual effort or accomplishment.
- Get to know your teammates and their strengths and weaknesses. Be willing to put your ego aside if need be for the good of the team as a whole.



**5 Use relaxation techniques before the race.** On the day of the race, you will likely be excited and nervous. This kind of stress will not allow your body to operate at peak efficiency. Meditation and relaxation techniques calm your body and help you mentally prepare for the race.<sup>[17]</sup>

- Visualization is a technique that works for many athletes. Much of your nervousness comes from anticipation of something unknown. Visualize yourself in your mind calmly overcoming the obstacles and running swiftly over trails.
- Deep breathing exercises also can work to relax your body and mind. As you inhale, think of energy coming into your body. Expand your chest and hold your breath for a few seconds. As you exhale, think of stress and fatigue that you are releasing from your body.
- Use the techniques that work for you. For example, if one of your teammates swears by meditation but you don't get any benefit from it, respect that you and your teammates might have differences in mentally preparing and keep open minded towards your teammates.

## References

1. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide>
2. ↑ <http://www.active.com/triathlon/articles/adventure-race-training-plan-step-one>
3. ↑ <https://mpora.com/fitness/training-plan-adventure-race-everything-need-know-get-physically-prepared>
4. ↑ <http://www.active.com/triathlon/articles/adventure-race-training-plan-step-one?page=2>
5. ↑ <https://mpora.com/fitness/training-plan-adventure-race-everything-need-know-get-physically-prepared>
6. ↑ <https://mpora.com/fitness/training-plan-adventure-race-everything-need-know-get-physically-prepared>
7. ↑ <http://www.active.com/triathlon/articles/adventure-race-training-plan-step-one?page=2>
8. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide>
9. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide?page=2>

10. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide?page=2>
11. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide?page=3>
12. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide?page=4>
13. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide?page=3>
14. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide?page=3>
15. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide?page=4>
16. ↑ <http://www.active.com/outdoors/articles/adventure-racing-101-a-quick-start-guide?page=4>
17. ↑ [http://running.competitor.com/2016/01/training/5-ways-to-mentally-prepare-for-your-next-race\\_141639](http://running.competitor.com/2016/01/training/5-ways-to-mentally-prepare-for-your-next-race_141639)

## About This Article



Co-authored by:  
**Michele Dolan**  
Certified Fitness Trainer

This article was co-authored by **Michele Dolan** and by wikiHow staff writer, **Jennifer Mueller, JD**. Michele Dolan is a BCRPA certified Personal Trainer in British Columbia. She has been a personal trainer and fitness instructor since 2002. This article has been viewed 10,050 times.

★★★★★  
2 votes - 100%

Co-authors: **3**  
Updated: **May 15, 2019**  
Views: **10,050**

Categories: **Individual Sports**

<https://www.wikihow.com/Safely-Train-for-an-Adventure-Race>

The text and visual content in this PDF is intended only for your personal, non-commercial use. Any commercial reproduction of the contents of this document without the express written permission of wikiHow, Inc., is prohibited.